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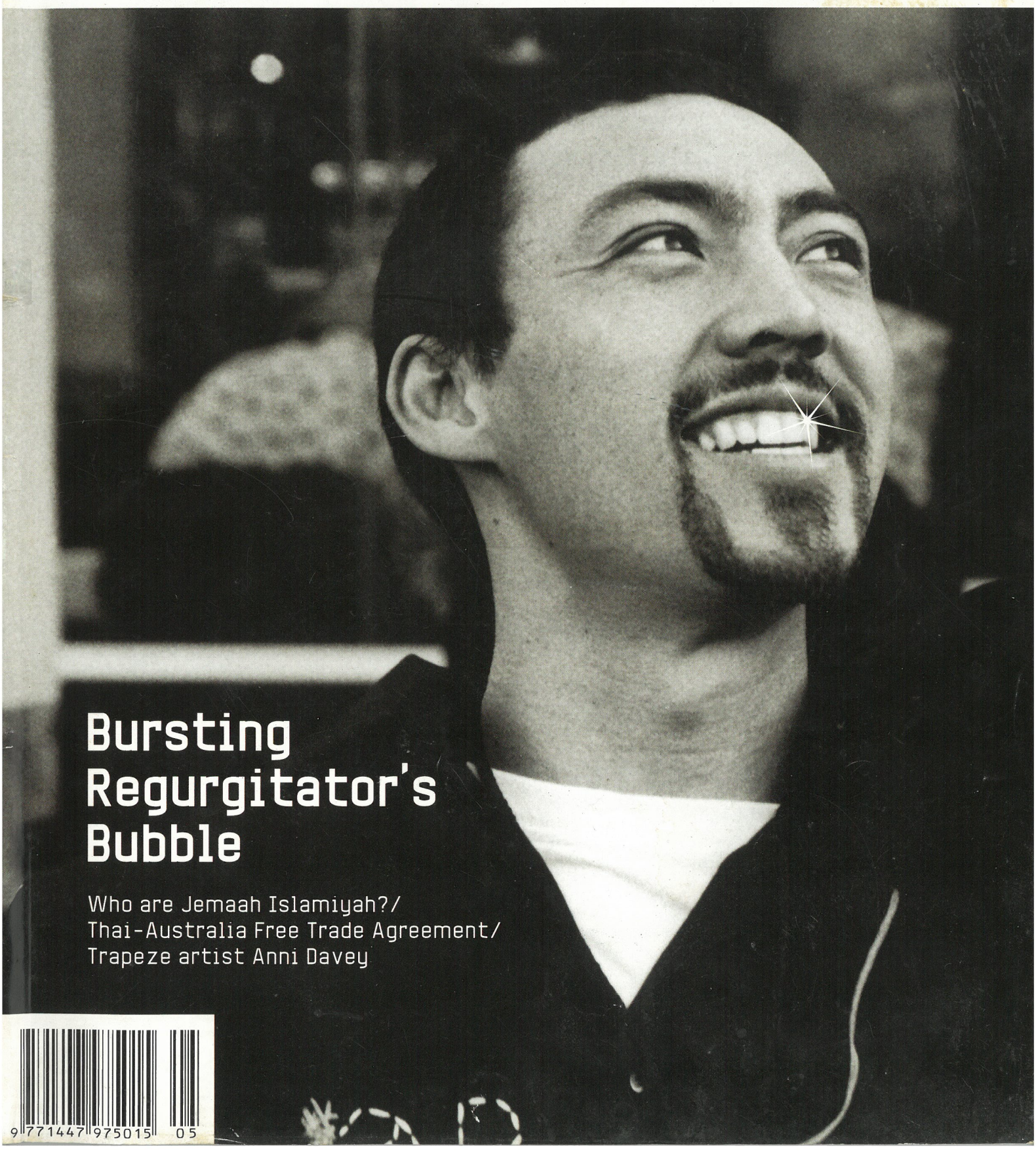

Bursting Regurgitator's Bubble

Who are Jemaah Islamiyah?/
Thai-Australia Free Trade Agreement/
Trapeze artist Anni Davey

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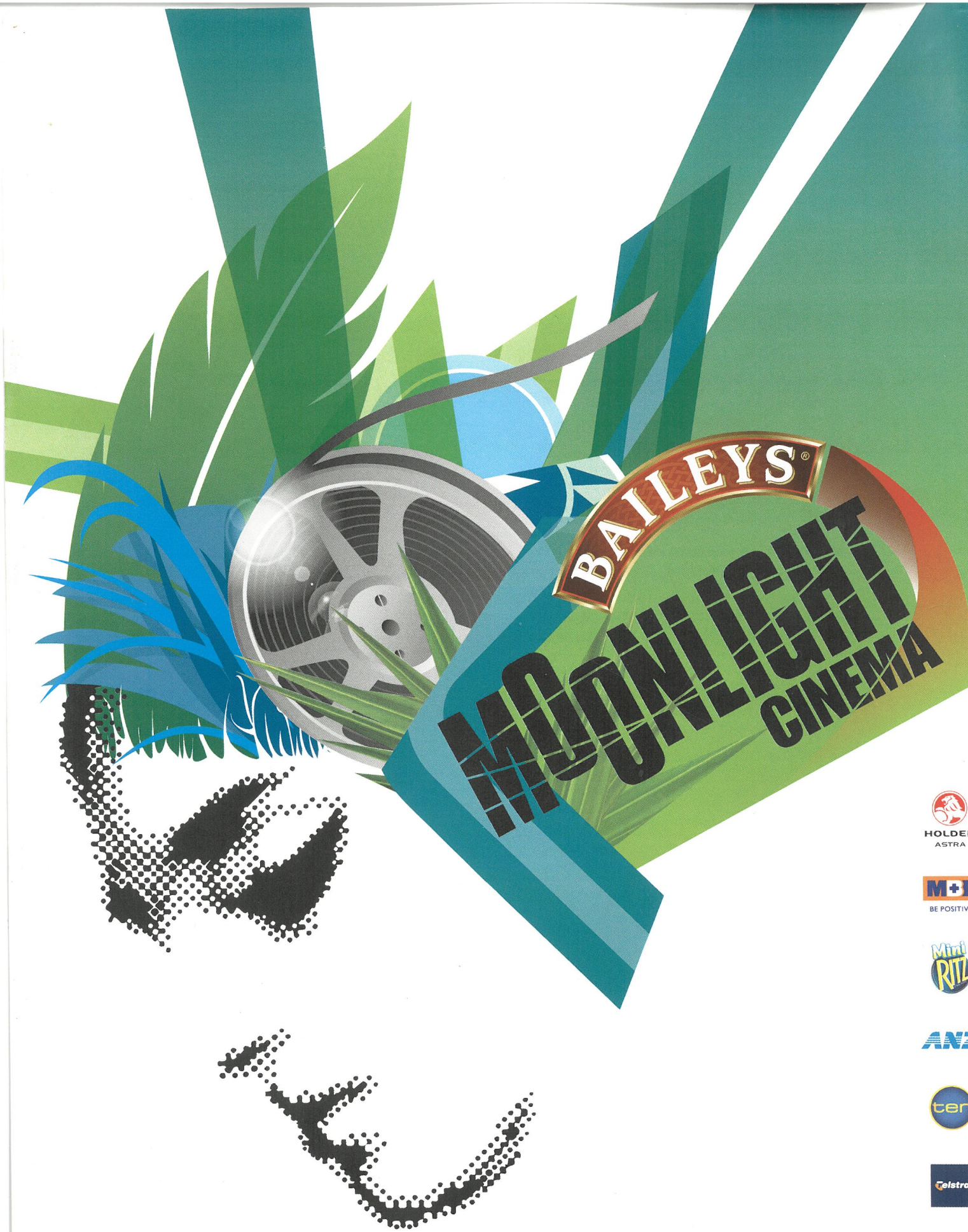

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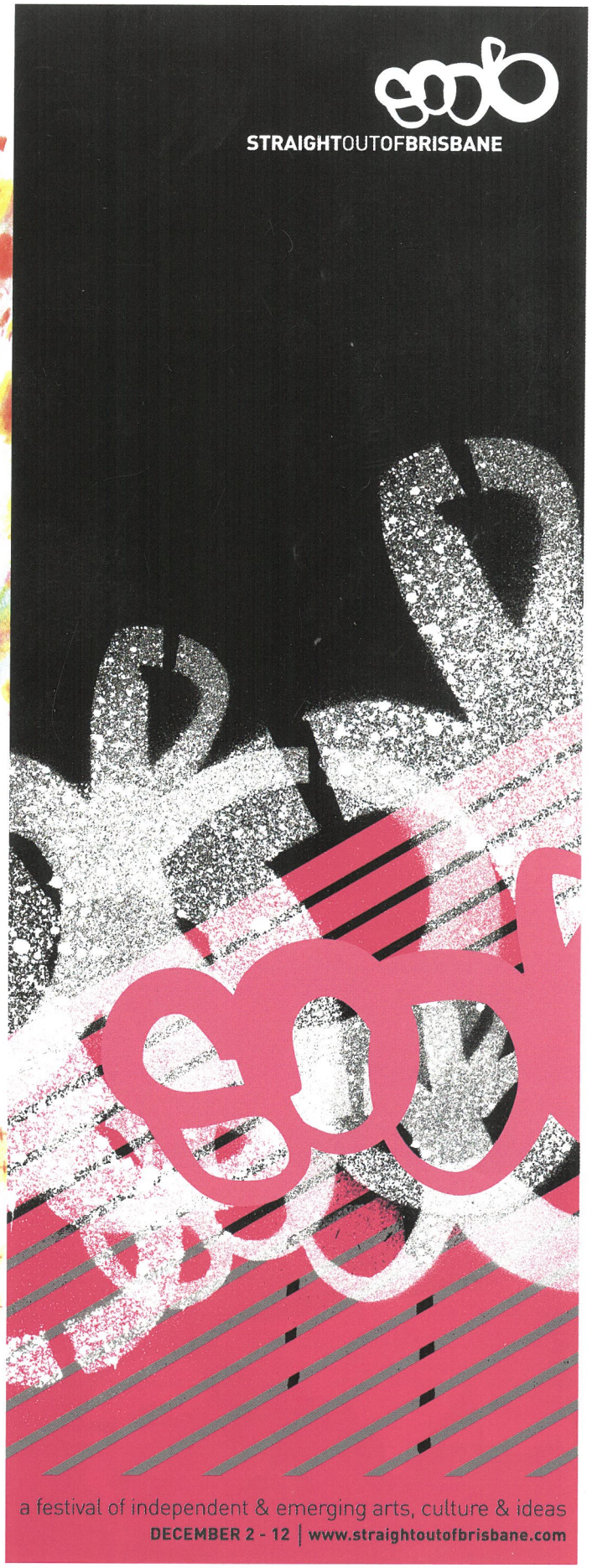
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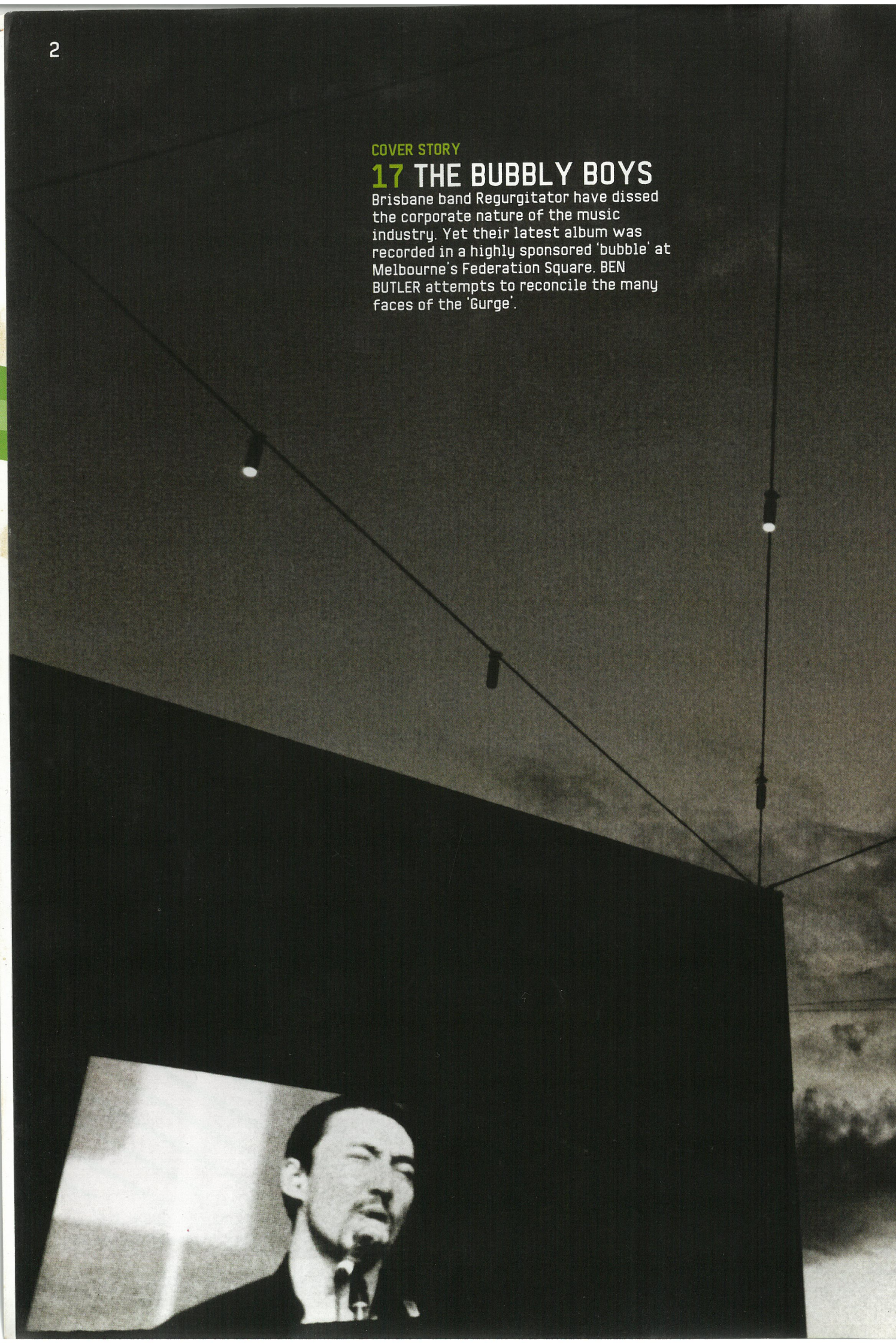
Brisbane band Regurgitator have dissed the corporate nature of the music industry. Yet their latest album was recorded in a highly sponsored 'bubble' at Melbourne's Federation Square. BEN BUTLER attempts to reconcile the many faces of the 'Gurge'.



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Changes to Australia's media ownership laws are back on the agenda. Be afraid.

EDITORIAL

"So is tomorrow the blue or the green?"

THE SPIN WE'RE IN

People are always asking us how we came up with the name, *SPINACH7*. Usually we just blame Sam de Silva, our producer. Perhaps we should have a more 'meaningful' response: Spinach, we could pretend, is evocative, alludes to, symbolises or subverts… we could spin spinach. But it's just a vegetable.

It might seem disingenuous to shrug at the idea of a *reason* for the name, *SPINACH7*, and then tell you that our reason for being, as a magazine and a media outlet, has never been clearer or stronger to us. We need better media in this country. We *can* imagine a media that consist of multiple, diverse spaces in which issues, even ideas, are discussed, information is imparted and people are heard — regardless of whether or not they have a PR campaign behind them. We don't just deserve it, or strive ourselves to be a part of creating it, we need it. Now.

As we write this Rupert Murdoch has just been handed the keys to the city of Adelaide. He was visiting the "spiritual home" of News Corp in order to attend the AGM that approved News Corp's move from the 'city of churches' to the 'land of relaxed corporate governance laws'. (It certainly doesn't have the same ring to it, but we're sure someone at Fox will come up with a snappy slogan, and then saturate your world with it).

What exactly do those keys unlock? Is there really anything or anywhere that Mr Murdoch does not already have access too?

In this country, there still is — he's not allowed to own a TV station in the same city as his newspapers. But that looks set to change. Howard tried to push through legislation to deregulate media ownership laws back in 2002, but was blocked by the Senate. Come July next year and a coalition-controlled Senate, the Australian media will have no such safeguard. We can look forward to News Corp TV and PBL-flavoured newspapers.

We can't underestimate the effect that the coalition's fourth and strongest term is going to have on media in this country — both commercial and 'public'. SBS is already under fire from the Department of Foreign Affairs for daring to challenge Downer's spin, and is likely to face cutbacks because of it.

The Howard Government is now in the most powerful parliamentary position of an Australian federal government in more than two decades. It has been 'given' a mandate to do as it pleases in this country. We don't doubt for a second that that will involve narrowing the scope for informed and dissenting debate.

It's obvious that ineffectual discussion spaces make for an apathetic, disengaged public, who'll readily settle for the status quo. The stakes are high. We need to get serious about creating.— and backing — a truly independent media.

Marni and Eve

YEAH, RIGHT...

Compiled by TIMOTHY MOORE and EVE VINCENT

ROGER THAT

While undertaking an artistic residency in Wanganui, New Zealand Richard Lewer decided to "get involved" in "small town life". That's one way of putting it: instead of signing up at the local tennis club Lewer got his hands on a scanner and listened in to the police and emergency frequencies. Boorish *SPINACH7* insisted on asking: "Is that legal?" Lewer explains that it's above board to stickybeak, but not to "act on the information".

Lewer tuned in every night from six until ten and drew as he listened. His work — based on an exhibition of the same name — has recently been published by Famous Visual Services in the art book *Goodnight*. As to be expected there's plenty of blood, gore, obscenities, UFO sightings, burning letterboxes / pets and a serial plait lopper in this collection. But there are quiet, uneventful moments as well: two clouds move across the moon. The result is a detailed series of incidents and impressions that range from the disturbing, obsessive, nasty and sad; to wry, ridiculous and evil-cum-funny.

Goodnight *is available in selected bookshops in Sydney, Melbourne and Auckland.*

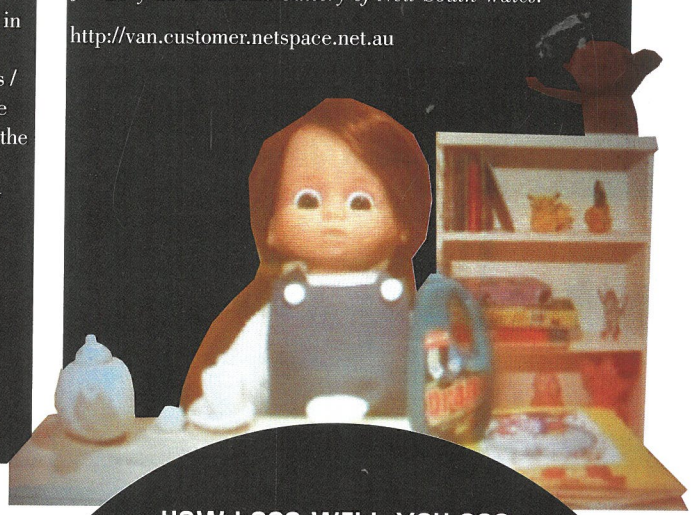
http://www.famousvs.com

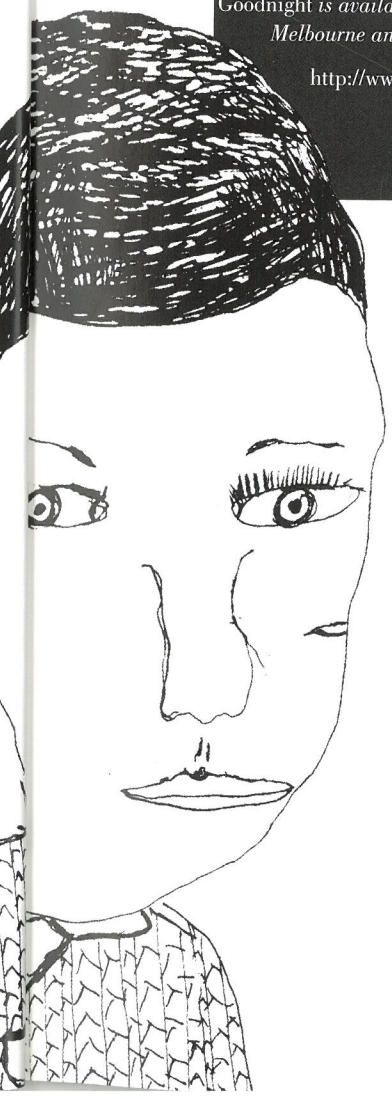
NEW AWARD

New media art may draw a lot of attention, but it's also drawing a lot of money. This December sees the launch of the $25,000 Anne Landa award, a biennial exhibition dedicated to the moving image and new media. Included is Isobel Knowles and Van Sowerwine's installation *Play With Me*, where the viewer manipulates an animated child. It's been much lauded by the art community for its black humour; it seems players can't get enough of forcing a doll to drink Draino.

The Anne Landa Exhibition runs from December 2 to January 23 at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

http://van.customer.netspace.net.au





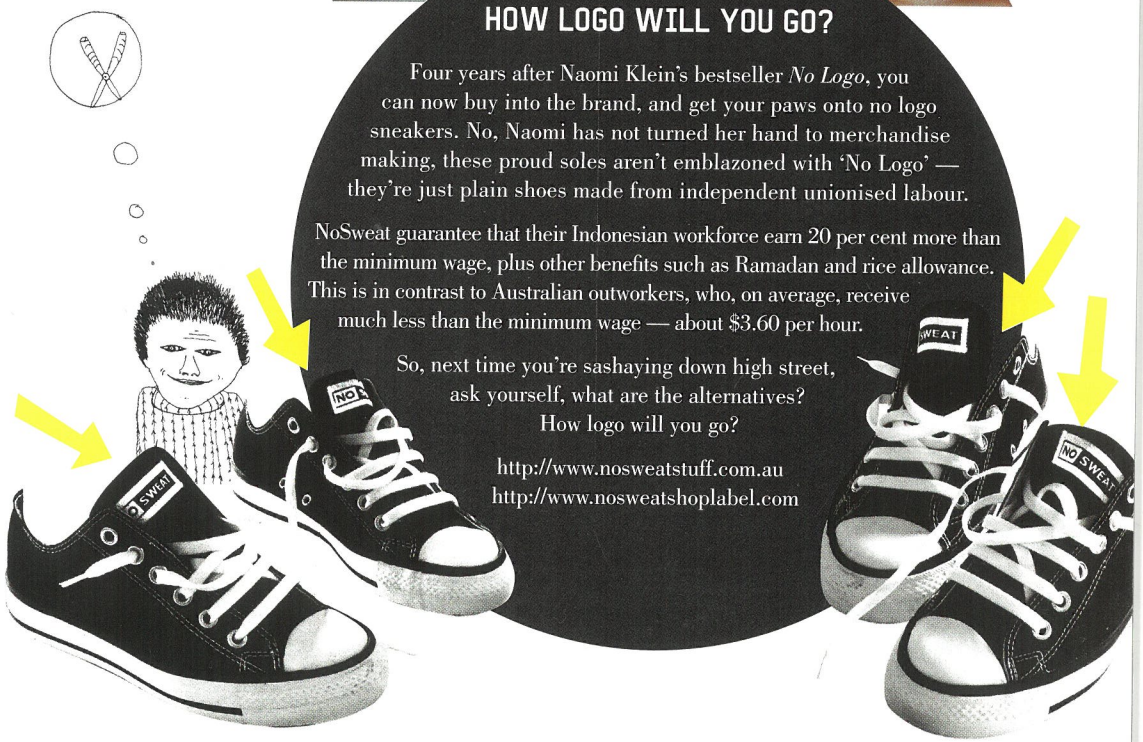
HOW LOGO WILL YOU GO?

Four years after Naomi Klein's bestseller *No Logo*, you can now buy into the brand, and get your paws onto no logo sneakers. No, Naomi has not turned her hand to merchandise making, these proud soles aren't emblazoned with 'No Logo' — they're just plain shoes made from independent unionised labour.

NoSweat guarantee that their Indonesian workforce earn 20 per cent more than the minimum wage, plus other benefits such as Ramadan and rice allowance. This is in contrast to Australian outworkers, who, on average, receive much less than the minimum wage — about $3.60 per hour.

So, next time you're sashaying down high street, ask yourself, what are the alternatives? How logo will you go?

http://www.nosweatstuff.com.au
http://www.nosweatshoplabel.com



YEAH, RIGHT...

I'M MISS WORLD...

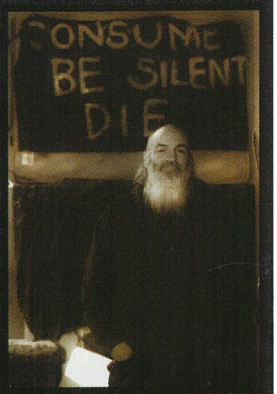
Ever since the United Nations boycotted the beauties in 1977, the Miss World pageant has been no stranger to political controversy. In 2002, religious riots forced the gaggle of girls and their entourages from the Nigerian capital, Abuja. The organisers now choose China as their world stage. Just like the impact of Shari'ah law on many Nigerian women, China's poor record on human rights seems not to have discouraged the organisers — after all China means new advertising revenue.

However, the Chinese hosts have already stolen the show before the Miss World winner is announced on December 4th. No, it's not the smile of Miss China, Meng Zhang, but the cajoled smile of Miss Plastic Surgery, crowned in China during October.

http://www.missworld.com

OVER THIRTY

Have you seen this poster? "Are you over 30 years old? You dress as a Punk, or a Goth, or a Rockabilly, or a Techno head?" Photographer Régis Martin wants to take your picture.



Over the past year Martin has been meeting respondents to this invitation, and photographing them in their living spaces. His black and white portraits document the appeal of expressive subcultures beyond a rebellious teenager's 'phase'. There's a preponderance of goths in Martin's final collection; and his oldest subject is Phil Bastard, a 50 year old punk posing in his warehouse in front of the banner, "Consume. Be Silent. Die." Martin himself is clean-cut, and earns a crust photographing "unhappy people" for reputable newspapers and magazines such as *SPINACH7*. This project appealed in part, because his subjects were, simply, "happy". They are "over thirty and still having fun".

Over Thirty *shows at Reportage Gallery, 20 Smith Street, Collingwood from November 25 to December 1.*

...AND I'M MISTER CALIFORNIA

Newcastle's Field Contemporary Art Space played recent host to a collection of kids' drawings. *Before We Were Artists* featured the under-14 work of the city's emerging and established artistes — stick drawings, biro scribbles, paint caked on thick, an early adolescent Jimi Hendrix screen-print and throughout: endearing misspelt commentaries and explanations. Of note, Yasmin Holm's (at age six) paper cut-out: a Jesus-featured man wearing a rainbow 'California' T, with ghoulish skulls and crossbones texta-ed all over his… wetsuit (?).

This exhibition gets our tick, smiley face stamp or even, gold star.

http://www.intradosgallery.org

HOW TO...

MAKE A KITE

Randall the robot likes nothing more than manually dexterous playtime challenges, and with summer coming on what could be more fun than an afternoon of kite making! So next time the wind starts whipping up your skirt or giving you an unwanted 80s blow-dry, don't fight it, play with it using your very own home-made kite.

1
Collect your materials. You'll need string, sticky tape, a sheet of thick paper (102cm x 102cm), two straight wooden sticks of bamboo or wood (90cm and 102cm). Grab some stuff for decorating your creation.

2
Make a cross with the two sticks and tie some string around the point where they join. Make sure the two sides of the crosspiece are equal in width, otherwise your kite will fly sideways.

3
Cut a notch at each end of both sticks, deep enough for the string to sit in. Wind a length of string all the way around the frame, making loops at the top and bottom. Make sure the string frame is nice and taught and that the cross hasn't lost its shape.

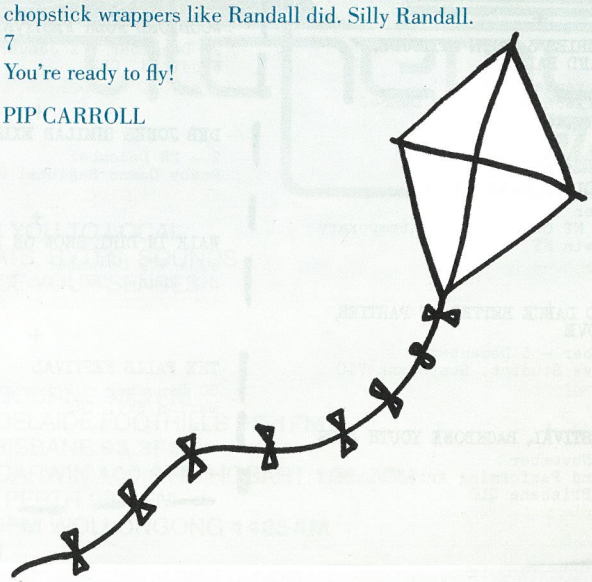
4
Lay the frame on the paper and cut around it, leaving a two to three cm margin. Now you get to decorate the paper! Randall chose polka dots. Bold colours work well because they can be seen from a distance, assuming your kite gets that far... Fold the edges of the paper over the string frame and tape them down so the paper is tight.

5
Cut a piece of string about 122 cm long and tie the ends to the loops at the top and bottom of the frame. Make another small loop in the string just above the intersection of the two crosspieces. Not long to go now!

6
Attach a really long piece of string (don't ask how long) to the loop near the crosspiece. Wind the other end around a reel. This is what you will hold when you fly the kite. Make a tail with another piece of string attached to the bottom loop. You can decorate the tail with ribbons, or you might choose chopstick wrappers like Randall did. Silly Randall.

7
You're ready to fly!

PIP CARROLL



ART IS ANYTHING YOU CAN GET AWA WITH

(SEE BELOW)

NOVEMBER

URBAN EDGE MIDLAND CONTEMPORARY ARTS FESTIVAL
29 October – 13 November
Perth, WA
www.urbanedge.info

+

SCULPTURE BY THE SEA
28 October – 14 November
Bondi to Tamarama, NSW
www.sculpturebythesea.com

+

FUSE FESTIVAL
25 – 27 November
Adelaide, SA
www.fusefestival.com

+

FAR AWAY, QLD THEATRE COMPANY
8 November – 4 December
Little Brown Studio, South Brisbane, QLD
www.qldtheatreco.com.au

+

TOP SHORTS, NAKED THEATRE COMPANY
25 Nov – 19 December
The Old Fitzroy Hotel, Wooloomooloo, NSW
www.nakedtheatrecompany.com.au

+

CONTEMPORARY ART AWARD
25 Nov – 18 December
Canberra Contemporary Art Space (CCAS), ACT
www.ccaa.com.au

+

VIVIENNE WESTWOOD EXHIBITION
12 November – 30 January
The National Gallery, Canberra, ACT
www.nga.gov.au

+

ART OF DIFFERENCE FESTIVAL
1 November – 5 December
Gasworks Arts Park, Albert Park, VIC
www.theprogram.net.au

+

THE BLUE ROOM SHOW 2004, CIRCUS OZ
3 Nov – 5 December
The Famous Speigeltent, Melbourne, VIC
www.circusoz.com

+

STUDIO SERIES 3 WITH ATTITUDE, QUEENSLAND BALLET
4 – 20 November
Thomas Dixson Centre for Dance, Brisbane, QLD
www.queenslandballet.com.au

+

ROBERT IOLINI: BLACK SHEEP
22 October - 20 November
24HRART, NT Centre for Contemporary Art, Darwin NT
www.24hrart.org.au

I WANT TO DANCE BETTER AT PARTIES, CHUNKYMOVE
17 November – 5 December
Chunkymove Studios, Southbank VIC
www.chunkymove.com.au

2HIGH FESTIVAL, BACKBONE YOUTH ARTS
26 – 27 November
Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC), Brisbane QLD
www.backbone.org.au

DECEMBER

HOMEBAKE
4 December
The Domain, Sydney, NSW
www.homebake.com.au

+

STRAIGHT OUT OF BRISBANE (SOOB)
2 – 12 December 2004
Various venues, Brisbane, QLD
www.straightoutofbrisbane.com

+

RESFEST 2004: DIGITAL FILM FESTIVAL
3 - 7 December
Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI), Melbourne, VIC
&
9 - 12 December
Dendy Opera Quays & The Studio, Sydney Opera House, NSW
www.resfest.com

+

SHORTER & SWEETER
30 November - 4 December
The Studio, Sydney Opera House, Sydney, NSW
www.sydneyoperahouse.com

+

IN THE RAW FESTIVAL: A TWO WEEK CELEBRATION OF NEW THEATRE, MUSIC AND ART.
30 November - 11 December
Darlinghurst Theatre, Potts Point, NSW
www.darlinghurstheatre.com

+

DESTINY DEACON: WALK & DON T LOOK BLAK
26 November - 30 January
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, NSW
www.mca.com.au

+

BAMBOO LOUNGE: MUSIC AND PERFORMANCE PROGRAM
3 December
Brown's Mart, Darwin, NT
http//membersl.inet.net.au/_brownsmart//

+

CITY OF PERTH PHOTOMEDIA AWARD
25 November – 19 December
Perth Institute of Contemporary Art (PICA), Perth, WA
www.pica.org.au

+

WOODFORD FOLK FESTIVAL
27 December – 1 January
Woodford, QLD
www.woodfordfolkfestival.com

+

DEB JONES: SIMILAR EXISTENCE
2 – 28 December
Roxby Downs Regional Gallery, Roxby Downs SA
www.countryarts.org.au

+

WALK IN DIRT: SHOW ON THE ROAD
3, 4 & 5 December
Sir Robert Helpmann Theatre, Mount Gambier WA
www.countryarts.org.au

+

THE FALLS FESTIVAL
30 December – 1 January
Marion Bay, TAS
www.fallsfestival.com

JANUARY

BIG DAY OUT
21 January (Auckland), 23 January (C
Coast), 26 January (Sydney), 30 Janu
(Melbourne) 4 February Adelaide) & 6
February (Perth)
www.bigdayout.com

+

**THINGS WE DO FOR LOVE, MELBOURNE TH
COMPANY**
13 January - 12 February
The Playhouse, Melbourne, VIC
www.mtc.com.au

+

**THROUGH THE WIRE: WORKSHOPS, GRIFFIN
THEATRE COMPANY**
22 – 24 January
Riverside Theatre, Parramatta, NSW
www.griffintheatre.com.au

+

SYDNEY FESTIVAL 2005
8 - 30 January
Various venues, Sydney, NSW
www.sydneyfestival.org.au

+

BILL HENSON EXHIBITION
8 January – 3 April
Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney, NSW
www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au

+

FLICKERFEST
7 – 15 January
Bondi Beach, NSW
www.flickerfest.com.au

+

HOWARD TAYLOR: PHENOMENA
8 December – 29 January
Bunbury Regional Art Galleries, Bunbu
www.artgallery.wa.gov.au

+

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PROFILE

Christie Petsinis

PHOTO: KATE MASSOLA

Christie Petsinis has always had an eye for the big picture. Back in the day, as a junior surf lifesaver, she challenged the EPA on their water pollution warnings, earning more notoriety than any 11 year old could expect. In her current architecture studies she tries to look "at the whole system, things are all interrelated, you can't isolate them". While as campaign coordinator for the Clean Ocean Foundation's *Hang 12* exhibition and auction, Christie is now "bringing surfing and art together".

Christie has pulled together some of Australia's most bankable artists, each customising a surfboard for sale to the highest bidder, with proceeds going to help clean up Australia's waters. The Foundation's priority is the closure of Australia's 142 outfall pipelines. Combined, these pipelines dump more than three billion litres of semi-treated water onto or near Australia's shoreline, every day. An avid surfer herself, Christie didn't have to go too far to find motivation. She says Australians "live by the coast and spend all summer by the coast, it's so much a part of our culture and it's just insane that we're destroying it".

Inspired by a similar project in the United Kingdom, Christie has been amazed by the generosity of the artists involved. And as for the boards themselves, Christie couldn't be happier, "I've just chosen works that I liked, I'm not an art curator by any means, I mean, I'm just an architecture student. They've all demonstrated very different approaches, some have painted on the board, others have sprayed, and some have chosen to do something three-dimensional." Julie Rrap's board has made a particular impression: "She's cast her arse into the surfboard. She grew up on the Gold Coast, and she's working with the idea of Gidget girls sitting on boards while their boyfriends are out surfing. She walked into this factory with bikini pin-ups all over the walls — where the boards were getting made — with a plaster cast of her arse in her hands." Christie laughs, then sighs. "It's been quite a lot of fun working with her." PIP CARROLL

Hang 12 *tours the Victorian surf coast, before opening in Melbourne at the George White Bar on November 15, and going to auction in Sydney on November 30.*

http://www.cleanocean.org

TAMING THE CROCODILE: SUPINYA VS SHIN CORP

The Thai telecommunications company Shin Corp has filed an unprecedented defamation case against local journalist Supinya Klangnarong.

In an article for the *Thai Post* newspaper on July 16, 2003, Supinya claimed that Shin Corp's soaring profits were largely due to favourable government treatment. The company was founded by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

Companies with strong links to government in Thailand enjoy operating privileges that allow them to dominate the market. Shin Corp controls several telecommunication businesses in Thailand including AIS, the country's biggest mobile phone company, Shin Satellite, the only Thai satellite communication provider, and iTV, Thailand's only non-government television channel.

In what seems like the reactionary equivalent of taking a sledgehammer to an anthill, Shin Corp has filed both a criminal and civil suit against both Supinya and the three editors of the *Thai Post*. The maximum penalty for criminal defamation in Thailand is two years jail and a 200,000 baht fine. In the civil suit Shin Corp is claiming 400 million baht in damages: 2,777 times Supinya's salary.

When asked why she believes she was made a target, Supinya says: "It's not common for corporates to accept criticism. What I have done in criticising them openly is a challenge, and so this trial is a symbolic war."

Historically, financial control of the media has enabled the Thai government to stifle criticism both of itself and affiliated companies. Until this most recent case however, that control was limited to a number of low profile skirmishes, as journalists faced threats of defamation, loss of contacts and even their jobs for writing unfavourable stories.

Prime Minister Thaksin has justified his crackdown on media criticism by arguing that it is bad for investment: "Today, serving the country is more important than sending your news dispatches daily to your editors. Think before you do anything that damages the country."

As secretary general of the Campaign for Popular Media Reform (CPMR), Supinya has long campaigned for freedom of speech in Thailand. Under the 1997 constitution, state-controlled media was to be liberalised, with content and ownership scrutinised by an independent regulator. Thus far plans to institute such a body have stalled. Meanwhile the telecommunications and media sectors, although ostensibly entities of private enterprise, enjoy an incestuous relationship with politics.

"In Thailand we say that we are running from the tiger, facing the crocodile. The tiger is the repressive authoritarian rule of the past. The crocodile is the challenge of capitalism," says Supinya. In order to meet this challenge Thailand needs to be committed to implementing a system of checks and balances. "If people have free speech it will be an effective tool to protect themselves," she says.

Supinya hopes that by making her lawsuit with Shin Corp public, she will set a new standard for free speech in Thailand and stimulate discussion about the links between government and business. The high profile case has opened up a lot of opportunities for advocacy — although she feels that she has also sacrificed a lot. "Emotionally it is about how I can handle a situation like this. Talking about it every day is stressful. Maybe it is valueless, because society won't care enough. But finally, you have to fight." MONIKA SARDER

ASIA PACIFIC BRIEFS

GAS DISPUTE DEEPENS NEIGHBOURLY TENSIONS

Beneath the shallow East China Sea, north of Taiwan and south of Japan, a huge amount of natural gas has been located, bringing with it the promise of readily accessible energy supplies for China's rapidly expanding industrial cities. However, the discovery is causing serious tension between China and its immediate neighbour in the region, Japan.

The 700-square kilometre Chunxiao gas field lies between Okinawa and Shanghai in the hydrocarbon-rich Xihu Trough. China aims to build a 400-kilometre pipeline to deliver more than a billion cubic meters of Chunxiao natural gas a year to Zhejiang province and parts of Shanghai. In 2003, the British–Dutch company Shell and the American company Unocal signed a deal with two Chinese companies to develop the Chunxiao field and explore other parts of the Xihu Trough.

However, China's plans have run foul of the messy history and politics of the region.

There is no agreed maritime boundary between Japan and China in the East China Sea. According to Japan, the boundary of Japan's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) lies at the so-called "mid-line" between the coastlines of the two countries. This places the Chinese drilling rigs on the Chunxiao field just a few kilometres on the Chinese side of the line — but the field almost certainly extends under the line into what Japan regards as its EEZ. China rejects the Japanese designation of the EEZ border, arguing that the edge of the continental shelf, hundreds of kilometres east towards the Pacific Ocean, is the true edge of China's maritime territory. For good measure, Taiwan agrees with China's refutation of the Japanese position, but says that it has a claim as well.

China's thirst for energy has pushed it well ahead of Japan in undertaking detailed geological exploration of the region, and establishing test drilling rigs up and down its side of the mid-line. This year, China sent geological survey vessels over the mid-line into what Japan regards as its EEZ. They were chased out by Japanese Self Defence Forces.

What would ordinarily be just another commercial dispute about the carve-up of oil revenues is complicated by history, politics and military concerns. Until recently the Japanese government was loathe to press its claims on the boundary too hard — largely to avoid arousing Chinese bitterness over the 1937–45 Japan–China war. However, under the UN Law of the Sea Convention, maritime boundary disputes of this sort are to be settled once and for all by a process of arbitration by 2009. The deadline is rapidly approaching for China and Japan to make their claims.

The whole issue took a new turn in September when Shell and Unocal unexpectedly announced that they were withdrawing from Chunxiao less than a year before production was scheduled to start. They no longer believed, they said, that the gas would be commercially viable. However, no details of the studies that brought them to this sudden about-face were made available, and it is possible that the territorial dispute between China and Japan made the foreigners nervous. Both Shell and Unocal are in bad political favour over their association with oil and gas production in Nigeria and Myanmar respectively, where they have been accused of producing hydrocarbon profits at the expense of human rights. The last thing either company needs is involvement in a possibly nasty international dispute.

But even without the western companies' involvement, the Chunxiao field will go ahead, and with it, a deepening of tensions between two countries that are not only sparring neighbours, but Australia's number one and two trading partners. RICHARD TANTER

UPHEAVAL IN THE FRENCH PACIFIC

A political earthquake in the region has passed largely unnoticed in Australia. Major changes are underway in New Caledonia, Wallis/Futuna and French Polynesia — the three French dependencies in the Pacific — after key politicians aligned with French President Jacques Chirac's political party Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP) were defeated in recent elections.

In French Polynesia, Chirac's close ally Gaston Flosse suffered an unexpected defeat in elections for Tahiti's local assembly, losing power to a coalition led by independence leader and anti-nuclear activist Oscar Temaru. In New Caledonia, the anti-independence strongman Jacques Lafleur has resigned from congress after his Rassemblement UMP party lost power in the May elections.

Jacques Lafleur and Gaston Flosse were two key pillars of French policy in the region — both have been in power for over two decades. Their defeat was not on the cards a year ago, when President Chirac toured New Caledonia and French Polynesia. In July 2003, Chirac hosted a France–Oceania summit in Tahiti with the leaders of 15 independent island nations. He urged the regional Pacific Islands Forum, which only allows membership to independent countries, to grant observer status to French Polynesia as a means of strengthening ties with the rest of the Pacific.

Little did Chirac know that it would be independence leader Oscar Temaru who would attend the meeting. At this year's Pacific Islands Forum in Apia, President Temaru used the opportunity to lobby for French Polynesia to be re-listed with the UN Special Committee on Decolonisation.

Independence is still a long way off in the French Pacific. Under the 1998 Noumea Accord, New Caledonia will only vote on independence after 2014. In Tahiti, President Temaru has stressed that his victory was a vote to change the government, not a referendum on independence. With a narrow majority in parliament, a public service filled with Flosse-appointees and a coalition government, Temaru's government was challenged by a no-confidence vote in October.

But change is in the wind. In New Caledonia, leaders of the Kanak independence movement today serve in a multi-party government alongside their former opponents. For the first time, two women are heading governments in the region. The new president of New Caledonia is businesswoman Marie-Noelle Themereau of the anti-independence party Avenir Ensemble (The Future Together). Her vice president is Kanak independence activist, writer and poet Dewe Gorode of the Party of Kanak Liberation.

Australia's government and media discuss the Pacific in terms of "failed states", "good governance" and corruption, but the issue of self-determination has dropped off the agenda. Many small island states have joined the United Nations General Assembly in the last decade, and there are indigenous movements around the Pacific seeking sovereignty and self-determination — in Bougainville, Guam, Tokelau, the French territories and more. NIC MACLELLAN

SMALL ISLANDS, RISING SEAS

In 2002 the tiny pacific country of Tuvalu gained international attention when it announced its intention to launch a lawsuit against Australia and the United States through the International Court of Justice in The Hague. It is predicted that Tuvalu, which is made up of nine atolls just four metres above sea level, will be uninhabitable within 50 years, because of rising sea levels caused by climate change. Australia and the US are the only two industrialised countries that have refused to sign the Kyoto protocol, a treaty that places quotas on carbon dioxide production, a major contributor to global warming.

Climate change is just one of the issues that will be on the table at the United Nations Conference on Small Island States (UNCSIS), to be held in Mauritius in January 2005. The conference brings representatives of government and non-government organisations from over 50 island states, and members of the international community, together. Small island developing states (SIDS) will seek support for the unique environmental and development issues that they face.

The 1992 Rio Earth Summit first recognised that SIDS face a distinctive set of challenges. Their small and isolated nature means that most of them are dependent on external markets for imports — yet small countries have little influence over global markets, and are increasingly locked into unequal trade agreements.

The impact of tourism is also a concern. Although tourism is a major part of SIDS economies, it has also become a problem in many countries, because of over-development, pollution, beach erosion, social and cultural conflict and crime.

The Global Conference on Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, where more than 100 countries adopted a program of action to assist SIDS in pursuing sustainable development, was held in Barbados in 1994. UNCSIS is a 10-year review of the Barbados declaration.

Pacific island leaders say progress on the Barbados declaration has so far fallen short of their expectations, and are concerned that results to date have not kept pace with problems. Poverty levels in some island states are increasing. There are also several issues that have arisen in the last decade which are not adequately addressed in the Barbados declaration, such as HIV/AIDS — and the crucial issue of climate change.

Global warming not only threatens the existence of a number of island nations, it has also brought an increase in coral bleaching and coastal erosion, and freshwater supplies are increasingly being corrupted by saltwater from rising tides.

Although the Tuvalu lawsuit against two of the world's biggest polluters never went ahead, the Tuvaluan Government continues to pressure Australia for guaranteed migration rights when its atolls become uninhabitable. The New Zealand government has guaranteed residency for a portion of the Tuvaluan population in the event of serious climate change. The Australian Government refuses to publicly make the same guarantee. MARNI CORDELL

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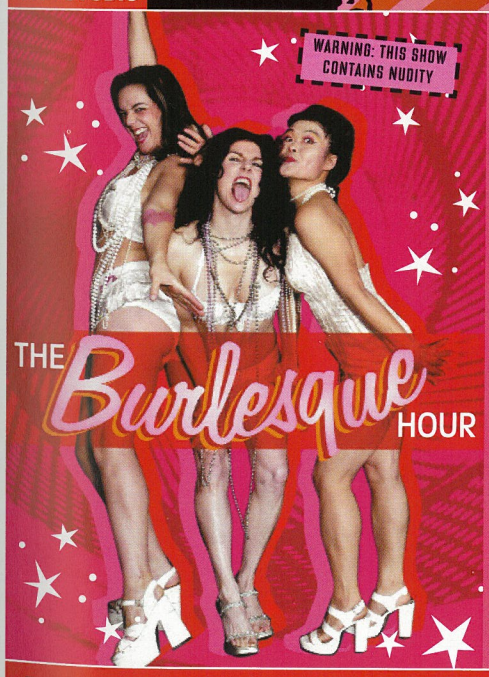

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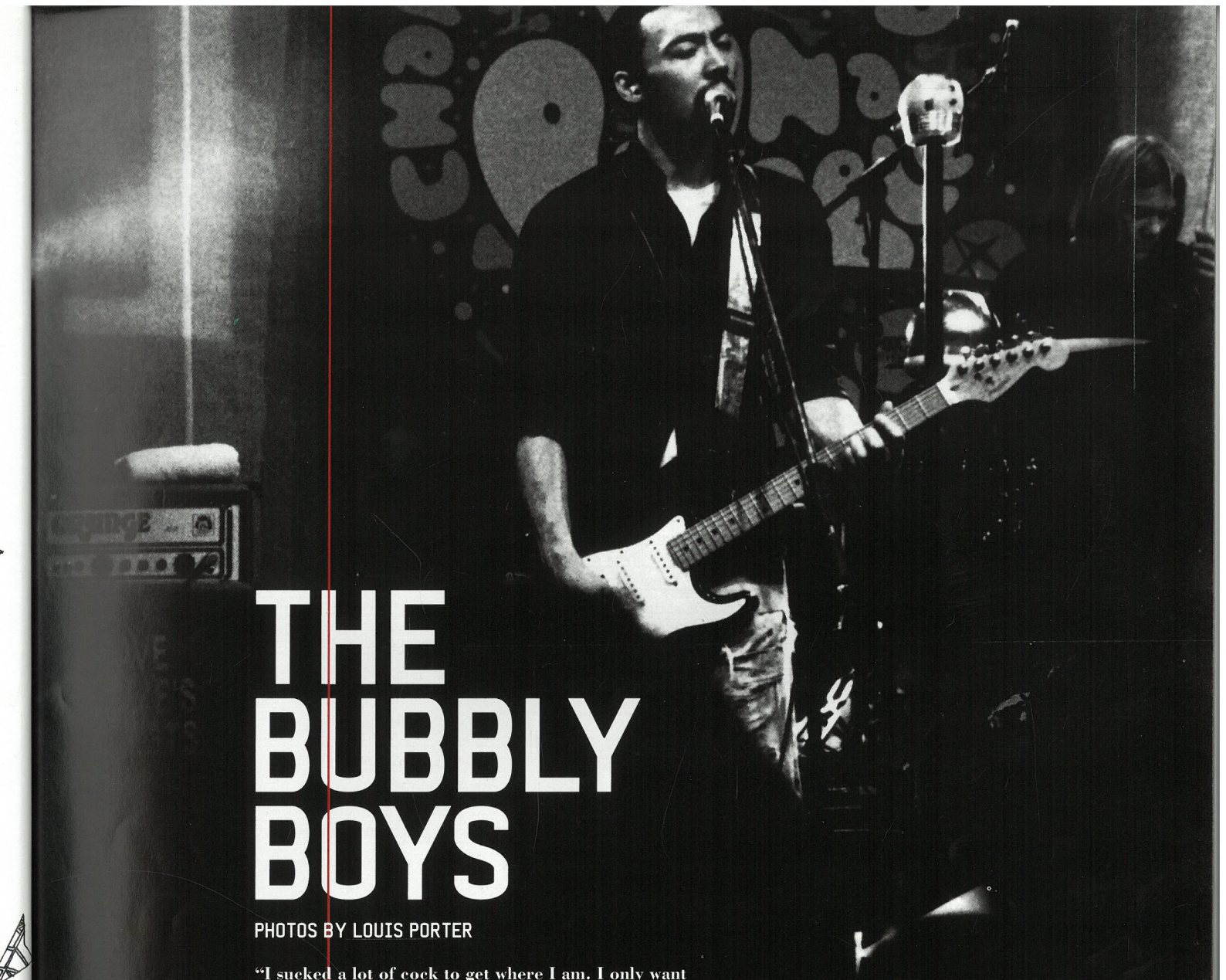


THE BUBBLY BOYS

PHOTOS BY LOUIS PORTER

"I sucked a lot of cock to get where I am. I only want to be the best that I can."

Regurgitator, *Tu-Plang* (1996)

Brisbane band Regurgitator have not only dissed the corporate nature of the music industry, they have resolutely refused to play the fame game. Until now.

Their latest album — out on November 8 — is the result of three weeks spent inside a bubble made of glass and sponsors' signs, amidst a daily schedule of X Box-shilling, interviews and live TV. BEN BUTLER talks to the 'Gurge to find out what that bubble thing was all about…

"Should I show them my tits?"

Federation Square, Melbourne, on a Friday night in September. People have come down to see Regurgitator record their new album inside a purpose-built 'bubble'.

The blonde girl asks her friend again: "Should I show them my tits?"

Her friend doesn't say anything. There's a pause. The blonde girl has decided. "I'm going to show them my tits."

It'd be fair to say that it's been a while since anyone flashed their tits at Regurgitator. They're not really that kind of band. Demo tapes? Sure. Tits? Maybe not.

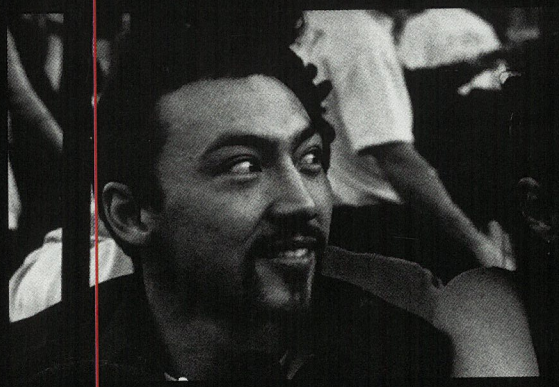
But this project has changed all that. Now they're attracting anyone and everyone who wants to see the freakshow: punks, suits who've already had a few after-work drinks, office girls out on the town. Even the odd fan of the band.

You can talk to the band through a scratchy intercom, and that's what the two teenage girls are doing now. Well, one of them is — the other one's just standing there, looking shy.

"Is it going to be as good as *Polyester Girl*?" the talkative one asks. She wants to know, because she did a school dance presentation to *Polyester Girl* a couple of years ago, and she got top marks for it.

"Yes," says Regurgitator's Quan Yeomans.

Yeomans can't remember the last time teenage girls dug the 'Gurge. "I think around *Unit* (1997) there was a bit of 13-year-old-girl action," he says.



The bubble itself is just the tip of the iceberg. Upstairs in one of Federation Square's buildings, a makeshift TV studio is pumping out 24 hours of TV a day for cable's Channel [V]. Just before dinnertime on a Friday night, there are only a handful of people working: one prepares slides of viewer emails to be shown while the band eat; one wiggles a joystick, manipulating the cameras that survey the bubble's interior; another sits by a mixing desk, monitoring the sound.

Inside the bubble, there's the band (Yeomans, Ben Ely and Peter Kostic), producer Magoo, engineer Hugh Webb and [V] host Jabba.

Underwriting all this is a complex web of corporate sponsorship — the list of sponsors, on display next to the bubble, is actually longer than your arm. The outside of the bubble is plastered with the sponsors' logos.

So what's going on here? Some kind of artistic venture, or an extensive marketing exercise?

Regurgitator's manager, Paul Curtis, reckons the former. "I basically started this project about five and a half years ago," he explains. "I had this idea of building a glass box in Queen Street Mall in Brisbane. It seemed like this weird logical step to me: take something that's an insular, artistic hidden-away kind of process (recording an album), relocate it into an extroverted, performed public process, and challenge [the band members'] creative mind set."

At the time, Regurgitator was signed to major label Warner Music Australia. Warner had made a lot of money from the band: debut album *Tu-Plang* went platinum with sales of over 70,000 units; their second album, *Unit*, ended up going triple platinum, selling over 210,000 copies. But Curtis didn't think the label would go for the idea. They didn't.

The band members were not sold on it either. Then one day, during a tour of the UK, Yeomans called Curtis out of the blue and said "Let's do this bubble idea, I just watched David Blaine." (Blaine, a US magician, suspended himself in a glass box above the Thames for 44 days.)

Regurgitator split from Warner in 2002 after a dispute on the direction of the band. "The relationship with Warner deteriorated slowly because we were going in more of a left direction and the label was going in more of a right direction. That's just the reality, they're a business," explains Curtis. "It was inevitable that we had to split. The release of [the singles compilation] *Jingles* was the end of the deal."

Regurgitator's guitarist Ben Ely says of the split: "They

thought it was over and we felt we needed to move on to grow as a band... When you have so many people working for your band things tend to get a little out of your control, and we are textbook control freaks"

Could the bubble have happened were Regurgitator still signed to Warner?

"No," says the project's event producer, Mark Pope.

So, on the one hand, the bubble represents the ultimate in doing it yourself: a band, freed from the control of a multinational corporation, strikes out on their own, doing their art, their way.

But there's a major contradiction here: those sponsors want to see some return for their investment. They want to see their brand names on the TV and in the paper. All that the band seems to want to do is record an album.

Keeping the sponsors happy is where Pope comes in. "Essentially [my job was] about getting a crazy idea into reality," he says.

"It's a case of pitching the idea and putting a price to it, and hoping that [prospective sponsors] buy the sizzle — but most importantly that, when it comes to reality, the sponsors needs are met. It's their money that allows $400,000 bubbles with a shelf-life to get built."

So is there really a major difference between working for a label and working for your sponsors — making sure their "needs are met"?

Curtis recalls that, back when Regurgitator was signed to Warner, Pope used to call him the "anti-record label guy."

"Paul had, and still has, a suspicion of 'corporate types'," says Pope. "I recall saying to him that sure, there were dishonest types in the corporate end, but so too were there dishonest types in the independent end. It was part of a larger pitch of trying to get him to understand his opinions on people that he was working with as opposed to dogmas or belief systems that suggest that 'all corporate bad — all indie good'."

Ely claims "As an independent [band] we have full creative control... The bubble was our idea, and we have always had a lot of say in the project, so I think we didn't have any restrictions other than the physical ones of being trapped in a glass jail for three weeks."

"If anything, I was amazed that [the sponsors] actually backed such a crazy hair-brained scheme to begin with," he continues. "I mean there we were: six fully grown pshycos locked in a glass box for all to see, doing what we loved and basically going nuts... What a scam!"

But how 'indie' can a project made possible by Optus, X Box and Channel [V] really be? Were they really just doing what they love — or just more in control of which compromises they made?

"It's been a crazy kind of partnership," concedes Yeomans. "It's constantly juggling, and doing ridiculous things."

"We have to do a live TV show every day at 5.30. That's one of the strangest things for a band to have to actually contemplate doing. It's one of those collisions."

But Yeomans reckons he was "actually more affected being on a major record label. [At least the bubble] is separate to the music."

According to Curtis, the band does understand that there's a conflict here — two different value systems, rubbing up against each other. But "you can't be stupid," says Curtis. "If you want to be a rock band, then you have to accept, understand and participate in the business side of things. It's

idiocy to say 'Oh no, I'm above that.'

"There has to be a give-and-take to pull something like this off. And I think generally, this project has worked out for everyone."

The sponsors are already happy. For them, it doesn't matter what the album sounds like. What matters is getting their products, their brand, seen by the right demographic. On that score, the bubble did well enough for the Melbourne *Age* to run a story — in the business section — chiding Arnott's for missing out on the opportunity. The biscuit company was approached for three weeks worth of free Shapes, but knocked the offer back. Meanwhile, the corporates who did cough up reckon they've reached that crucial youth demographic.

But what has the band got out of it? Curtis says it cost them somewhere between $100,000 and $150,000, out of a total project cost of around $900,000. You could certainly record an album independently for that much cash — admittedly not with this sort of media saturation.

There is one thing that everyone involved in the bubble on the band side of things seems a little hazy on: and that's the point of the whole exercise.

Usually, if you want to be in a successful rock act, you have to decide just how far you will go to achieve your dream: are you prepared to give up your life? Sack that fat bass player you've known since high school? Betray your friends? Grasp and grin, meet and greet, shake and fake friendship with a bewildering array of showbiz suckholes?

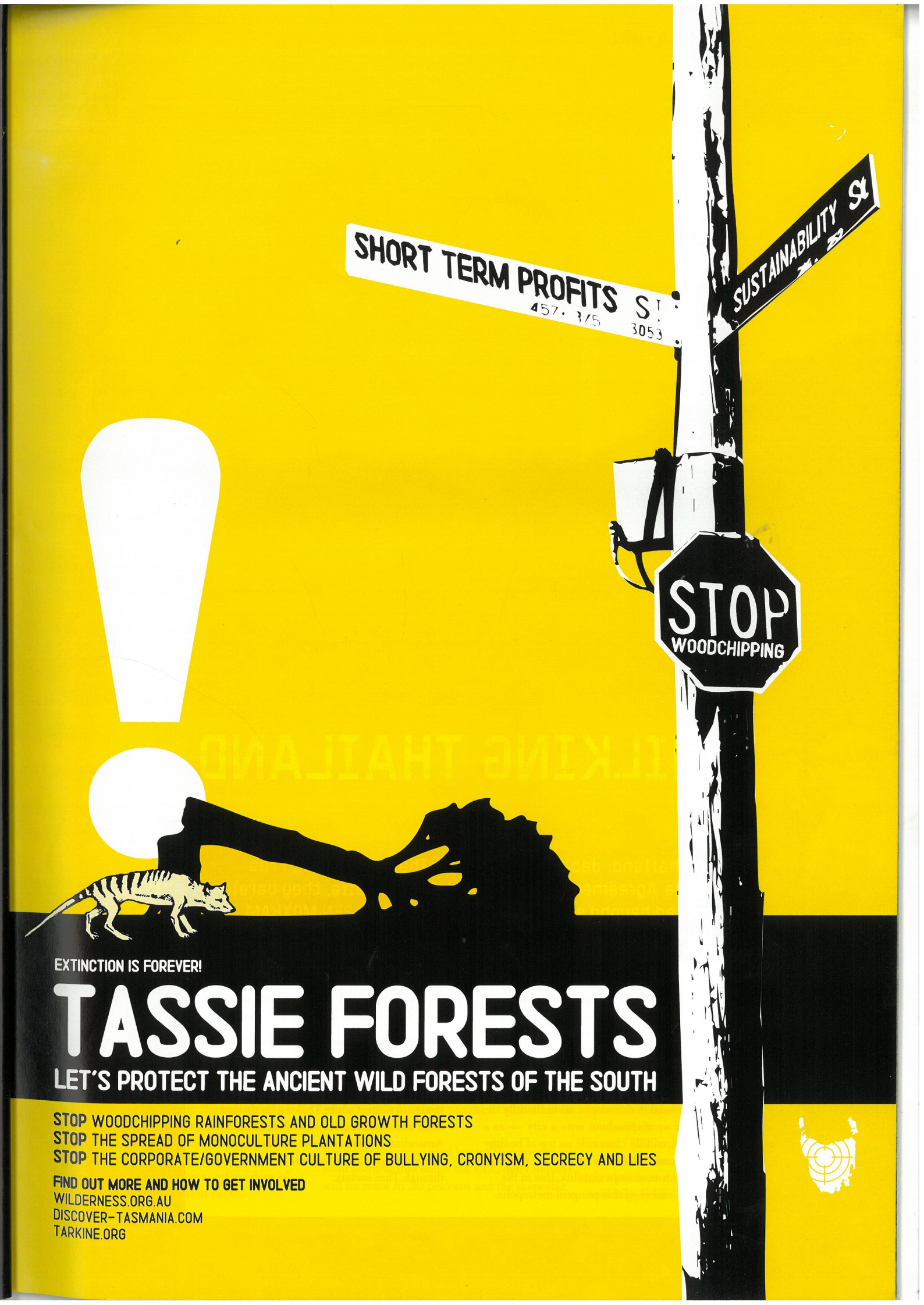
Regurgitator have resolutely said no to almost all of that. They skipped straight to the top of the charts instead, with as much of their credibility intact as is possible when you're signed to a major label. And then they chucked it in, refused to slog it out across America in return for a shot at the really big time, got off their major — when kids in bands across the world still dream of being picked up by one of the big conglomerates — and went back to Brisbane to do their own thing.

They could have recorded an album without doing this (although they would probably have struggled to promote it effectively). They could have moved from music into art projects, like early 90s dance-pop act the KLF. Reinventing themselves as the K Foundation, the KLF burnt the million pounds profit they made from their succession of top 10 hits.

Instead, they've done this — a project that isn't entirely sure what it is. It's an odd move for a band that has never in its career crawled through the shit like most bands have to.

It worked — they've got a new record — but what has this whole thing done to their career? And what does it all mean?

BEN BUTLER WRITES A SYNDICATED WEEKLY MUSIC COLUMN AND EDITS ROCKNERD.ORG



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MILKING THAILAND

In Thailand, debates about the Thai-Australia Free Trade Agreement were heated. In Australia, they barely spread beyond a few offices in Canberra. BEN MOXHAM investigates the critics' claims.

Bangkok is a sprawling mess of development, hemmed in by skyscrapers and droning expressways. Slums take shelter underneath the overpasses, their residents sweating over *som tam* stalls. Scattered temples are outnumbered by brothels — all blinking lights and car-parks full of Mercs.

Here, social divisions can seem literally vertical — mapped out onto a city — as a nascent middle class ride on top of healthy GDP figures while the rural poor, uprooted by their non-economic viability, live in the hidden niches of this pungent metropolis.

These twin processes of growth and alienation will be accelerated by the recently signed trade deal between Australia and Thailand.

Farmers and critics claim that Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's government sold out small farmers in order to boost his own business interests. Thousands took to the streets in protest while Thaksin lambasted them and obscured negotiation details. The Australian Parliament now stands poised to ratify an agreement that will send ripples through Thai society.

PHOTO: MARNI CORDELL

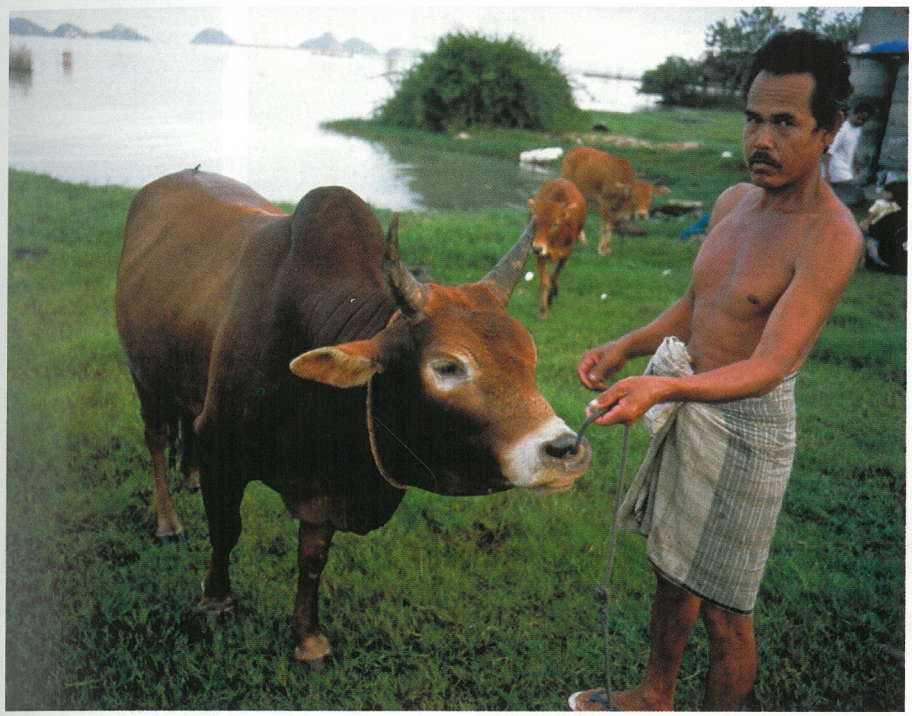

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PHOTO: BEN MOXHAM

Adul Vangtal

"Thai farmers will be directly competing with Australia's agribusiness juggernaut. They're panicked."

The (not so) Fine Print

The Thai-Australia Free Trade Agreement (TAFTA) was concluded in the middle of 2004 and will come into effect at the start of 2005. Then, more than half of Thailand's 5,000 tariffs will be eliminated on products such as instant food, cars and jewellery. The remaining tariffs will be eliminated by 2010 on products such as canned tuna, textiles, footwear, auto-parts, steel, chemical products and plastics. On the Australian side, 83 per cent of tariffs will be cut to zero next year, with the remaining categories to be cut by 2015.

While Australian consumers might get 10 cents off their imported durians and rambutans, Thai farmers will be directly competing with Australia's agribusiness juggernaut. They're panicked. To allay their concerns, the TAFTA provides a longer phasing out period for directly competing products like beef and pork. And in the most contentious area, milk and dairy products will eventually be able to enter Thailand tariff-free by 2020.

Adul Vangtal, the president of Thai Holstein Friesian Association, is an outspoken critic of the TAFTA. He explains that milk has never been widely consumed in Thailand. Instead, the dairy industry was born through an act of Royal social and dietary engineering 40 years ago. The King saw it both as an opportunity to create employment in struggling rural communities and introduce a serious dose of calcium into the diets of Thai youth.

It has been reasonably successful: "The farmers in Ratchaburi province where I am from used to be sugarcane farmers but they were badly in debt," explains Adul. "The government started this project with the King to assist these indebted farmers. Now farmers have enough cash income to buy a bicycle or a motorbike and to send their kids to school."

According to Adul about 40,000 families work in the dairy industry, organised into 117 co-operatives. This "social farming" as Adul calls it, is the lifeline that binds communities together. It's a pattern all over Thailand where 60 per cent of Thais depend on agriculture and a third of these are small-scale farmers.

Compete How, Thai Cow?

This is in stark contrast to the way cow business is done in Australia. According to Dairy Australia, Australia had 10,654 registered farms in the 2002/2003 financial year holding about 200 cows each. While in Thailand, "99 per cent of farmers are small with only 10 to 20 head of cattle each," says Adul. Given the economic strength of the larger Australian farms, the more favourable climate and higher technology, Australia can produce milk for about two thirds of the cost of Thai farmers.

Research commissioned by the Thai government predicts that under the FTA, dairy imports will increase by 30 per cent and the domestic price will drop by 30 per cent. With these prices, "all the social farms will dissolve and farmers will lose their jobs," says Adul bleakly.

The Thai Government dismisses such pessimism arguing that dairy tariffs will be slowly phased out, giving farmers enough time to adjust. "Adjust to what? Adjust to our lost jobs?" says an exasperated Adul.

Fundamental differences in land and climate make talk of 'adjustment' meaningless. "Even EU and US farmers can't compete with Australia and they are far more developed with higher production techniques than Thailand," points out Jacques-Chai Chomthongdi, a trade campaigner with the research NGO Focus on the Global South.

The Thai government also counters that if producers are hurt by imports, it still has the right to implement safeguard measures. Adul strongly doubts their will, given their lack of assistance to the industry's existing problems. Even without the increased imports that lowered tariff barriers would bring, competition is already hurting farmers. "Our raw milk already has to compete with imports of powdered milk," explains Cherdchai, a farmer from Udon Thani province. "Each year, when the imported products come, the price of our milk drops and we are forced to throw it away." While production grows by 10 per cent a year, consumer demand is only growing at five per cent. "So we already have an oversupply problem here," adds Adul.

Thai farmers take to the streets. PHOTO: FTA WATCH

"There will be an erosion of the social fabric in the rural areas. Failed farmers will be forced to come to Bangkok."

Jacques-Chai Chomthongdi
PHOTO: BEN MOXHAM

Australia has promised not to compete in the fresh milk market in Thailand. It's a generous offer considering Australia has never exported fresh milk to Thailand: it would get stinky before it hit the Bangkok docks. But it's the raft of other dairy products, in particular powdered milk that eats into the domestic price of Thai milk.

While the average Australian café junkie might throw a tantrum if given powdered milk with their flat white, Thai consumers aren't so fussy. Retailers often substitute cheaper powdered milk for fresh milk, knowing that they can skimp on quality without putting a dent in sales. But it drags down the price of healthier, fresh milk, the sales of which keep the local industry alive.

"Many farmers have already sold their land in anticipation of hard times," notes Adul. "Why should they keep risking debt to improve our production when we know we are going to lose?"

Jacques Chai argues that the TAFTA will heighten the tremendous demographic pressures already facing Thailand: "There will be an erosion of the social fabric in the rural areas. Failed farmers will be forced to come to Bangkok. It is already overstretched with a population of 10 million and a third of that is unregistered."

Thai dairy farmers staked their hopes on receiving adjustment assistance from both the Thai and Australian governments. But after Adul attended a recent meeting at the Ministry of Agriculture — at which the dairy farmers' delegation presented a rescue package for their industry — he emerged dejected: "This government is too cunning. There is no plan at all to save our livelihood, our culture, our way of life."

This was not the case in Australia. When the dairy industry was deregulated in Australia in 1999, the government recognised the risks to farmers and set up the Dairy Structural Adjustment Program. Unlike structural adjustment pushed by the World Bank throughout the Third World, the Australian version actually helped people. Eligible Australian farmers have received roughly AU$120,000 each in government payments since 2000. Even then, many farmers have been forced to leave, possibly coaxed by the meager $45,000 exit payout. The trend toward bigger, fewer farms has meant about 10,000 dairy farms have disappeared since the early 1980s, as corporate farms swallow family ones.

Ideally the Thai dairy industry needs market protection. But under the FTA, an industry assistance package is unlikely to be forthcoming. Instead, ruined farmers will probably get a few square metres in a slum on the outskirts of Bangkok. Or, others fear, will turn to narcotic production. The King — many of whose Royal agricultural projects were geared toward supporting viable alternatives to growing poppies — is apparently not pleased with the FTA, but will not let the government lose face.

The Golf Between Rich and Poor

All this is a steady shift from the promises that swept Thaksin and his Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais) (TRT) party to power in 2001. Building his Shin Corp business empire in the 1990s, he launched an ambitious political campaign in the wake of the 1997 financial crisis to help the poor and to protect domestic business from predatory international capital. Yet his philosophy has always been profoundly corporate, proclaiming in 1997 that, "A company is a country. A country is a company. They are the same." Since taking power in 2001 he's tried to run Thailand like a CEO. Following that logic, it makes sense to use FTA negotiations to promote your high performing sectors and outsource your uncompetitive ones.

The wealth of TRT members is staggering. "They own 40 per cent of the total value of the stock market" says Jacques-Chai. "The Shinawatra family itself owns 10 per cent." With the rise of Thaksin, politics blurs into business; and business blurs into golf games in Thailand. He's well known to play golf with his inner clique of key party financiers and cabinet members: Prayuth Mahakitsiri, Suriya Jungrungruangkit and Somsak Thepsuthin.

Perhaps needing an even more private place for their discussions, Prayuth bought his own golf course, paying 1 billion baht (AU$35 million) in cash in October 2002. Maybe he had the spare cash floating because a few months prior, 15 billion baht was questionably shaved off one of his bad debts in a copper smelting project by a government bailout fund. It's just one example of the pall of cronyism that covers Thai business and politics under TRT. It hangs particularly strong over the TAFTA: in numerous instances TRT members stand to profit from greater access to Australian markets.

Shin Corp plans to launch its iPSTAR satellite above Asia, through its Shin Sat subsidiary. It is one of the most advanced satellites, dwarfing existing competition with its capacity to provide broadband internet. But the high-risk project was plagued by delays and the political complexities of the region — until Telstra came along. The two companies signed a deal earlier this year where Telstra will build earth stations for iPSTAR in Kalgoorlie in Western Australia and Broken Hill in New South Wales in return for a slice of the broadband capacity.

It fits a pattern. FTAs have been an indirect mechanism for Shin Sat to nudge aside its orbital competition. Since negotiating the Thai-China FTA, Beijing for example, has moved the orbit position of its own satellites to make way for iPSTAR, while Chinese agriculture imports under the deal are decimating northern Thai farmers. Similarly, Shin Sat recently announced a partnership deal in New Zealand while the Thai-NZ FTA is in the works.

Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra PHOTO: AP/APICHART WEERAWONG

Shin Corp also stands to benefit from the near comprehensive liberalisation of the Australian telecommunications sector, raising questions about a possible conflict of interest. "It is difficult to deny this," says Jacques-Chai. "Australia made an offer to liberalise under the FTA (except on Telstra ownership). They liberalised everything else, especially mobile phones." Jacques-Chai questions what was discussed at an APEC summit meeting between Thaksin and Australian Prime Minister John Howard. The two had what has been dubbed a 'four eyes' discussion (with no one else present), "after that, there was a significant increase in what Thailand would liberalise."

Both Shin Corp and the Australian government were quick to counter the allegations of back room deals arguing that what Australia offered is no greater than what they offered under the Doha round of World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations. But WTO negotiations can be glacial, points out Jacques-Chai, and the earliest the Doha negotiations could be concluded is at the next WTO ministerial scheduled for Hong Kong at the end of 2005. Shin Corp gets at least a 12 month head start on other foreign investors.

FTA'ed

Can Thaksin's passion for negotiating FTAs — eight are currently on the table — be explained purely as cold hard trade offs? Professor Pasuk Phongpaichit, co-author with Chris Baker of the recently published book *Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand* notes "[TA]FTA has dubious benefits, but that is the same for most of the FTAs that this government is pursuing." She elaborates, explaining that the government's "enthusiasm for FTAs has to be explained in terms of politics (because it does not make sense in terms of economics). These agreements are a new kind of international diplomacy, and for Thaksin, are part of his self-promotion on the international stage."

Jacques-Chai also cautions against blaming the sell-out of farmers under the FTA purely on the antics of TRT. FTAs themselves, according to Jacques-Chai, are tools of developed countries, like Australia, to pry open the economies of developing countries like Thailand. And while larger Thai businesses are strong enough to capitalise on such liberalisation, smaller businesses flounder.

"This is not the only FTA under which small producers are being sacrificed. It seems to be the pattern," says Pasuk. For the dairy industry, the precedent set in the TAFTA is coming back to haunt the Thai negotiators, especially in the current negotiations with

New Zealand. While Australian competition is stiff, it's the green pastures of Middle Earth that Thai dairy farmers deeply fear. New Zealand dominates global dairy production and they're pushing for a quicker liberalisation timetable under their FTA. Farmers like Chernchai may be buried in the milk powder from Mordor.

Adul and his dairy cohort are businessmen and although bitter, they must make the best of being FTA'ed: "We would like to use Thailand as a dairy hub for the region and hope to be able to collaborate with the New Zealanders. It's an opportunity for both sides." They met with the New Zealand delegation who didn't endorse this 'win-win' optimism. They argued instead that promotion of Thailand's dairy industry was the job of Thailand's government. Failing that, perhaps they could enter the satellite business?

Thailand is not Shinland

Journalist Supinya Klangnarong is concerned that, "There is a radical liberalisation and we do not have the time to democratise the institutions needed to monitor these processes." Countless farmers and activists like Adul and Jacques-Chai made their concerns known to the government negotiators but got nowhere. "Thaksin never listens to anyone," says a frustrated Adul.

It was a fight even to see the final document. "The government only released the text of the FTA after it was released on the Australian [Department of] Foreign Affairs and Trade website," says Jacques-Chai. "Even then, it was only after public pressure was applied that it was translated into Thai," he adds. He points to Thai government paranoia. "They don't want to face resistance and scrutiny that can pick up on alleged conflicts of interest."

"To organise farmers we held discussion all over the country," says Adul. "The police asked our dairy co-op meeting to stop otherwise they would take away the meeting's papers. They said that they had been ordered to do so; to check on the activities of all the co-operatives. All of the president's of the co-ops are being pressured this way. We feel that we have lost our freedom of expression and our freedom to milk our cows," laments Adul.

This intimidation is not a bluff. Since Thaksin came to power, 17 activists have been assassinated (see: The State of Fear) and his "war on dark influences" has resulted in the extra-judicial killing of some 2,500 alleged drug dealers and users in the last two years, spreading fear throughout Thailand.

Such censorship is endemic in a nation where Thaksin — Southeast Asia's own version of Italy's Silvio Berlusconi — owns nearly all of the private media and controls all of the government media. Supinya faces a 400 million baht defamation suit for her trouble (see: Taming the Crocodile on page 12).

To justify such repression, Thaksin has awkwardly invoked the 'nation' as his driving reason: "Having debates and so many different opinions is just selfishness… Everyone has to unite for the country to progress," said Thaksin. But "Thailand is not Shinland" as one FTA protest banner points out and thousands took to the streets to underline the point on June 28, marching to Government House. A broad range of protestors, from HIV activists to unionists fighting further privatisation, were present, adding to the growing dissent that is eating into Thaksin's popularity figures. Even major political parties are waking up to the issue, forcing TRT to backtrack and commit to monitoring the impact of the FTA.

Adul is prepared to take to the streets again if farmers are suffering and Thaksin does nothing. "Thaksin will lose government if he doesn't listen to the dairy farmers." We start discussing possible actions they could do. What about filling the nearby *khlong* (canal) with your wasted milk? "Yeah, let the government smell the rotting milk," laughs Adul.

But will the Australian Senate address Thai farmers' concerns when the agreement comes up for debate? Will the stench make it all the way to Canberra?

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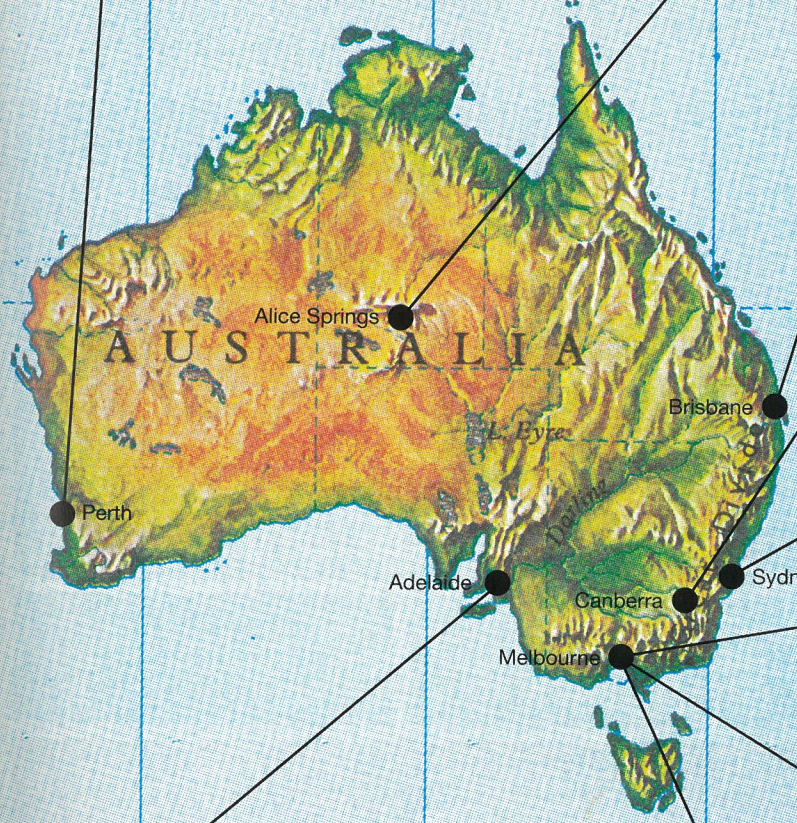
The State of Fear

Over the course of Thaksin Shinawatra's administration, 17 environmental and human rights advocates have been murdered, or are missing, presumed dead. Among those listed are community leaders opposed to: a dam in Surat Thani; influential figures' encroachment into a mangrove forest in Phuket; and illegal logging by forestry officials in Tha Chana district.

In a recent high profile case Charoen Wat-aksorn was shot dead in June in Prachuap Khiri Khan. Charoen had led a successful campaign against two massive "dirty energy" generating power plants, which would have been dependant on coal imports. He was greeted with a bullet after returning home from Bangkok by bus, where he had alleged before a Senate Committee that powerful local figures were attempting a public land grab. Charoen's case highlights the general complaint of Thai activists, acknowledged by the United Nations, of "complicity between local authorities and private sector companies in cases of killings and other attacks on human rights defenders" opposed to the "negative environmental and social impacts" of particular private sector projects. Five suspects for Charoen's murder were arrested in September, including local politicians.

The links between Thaksin and TRT, and the murders and disappearances, are hazy. But the government has only encouraged suspicion by ignoring public pressure for thorough, transparent investigations that involve nationally assigned taskforces, rather than potentially corrupt local police. It has also failed to respond to calls for better protection of community leaders "at risk". Instead, some analysts conjecture that the Thaksin administration is involved in its own massive public land grab, and privatisation junket; that they use state-controlled media to "demonise civic groups and grassroots movements"; and that under the rule of a "strong PM", civil society and participatory democracy is under attack.

INDEPENDENT RADIO



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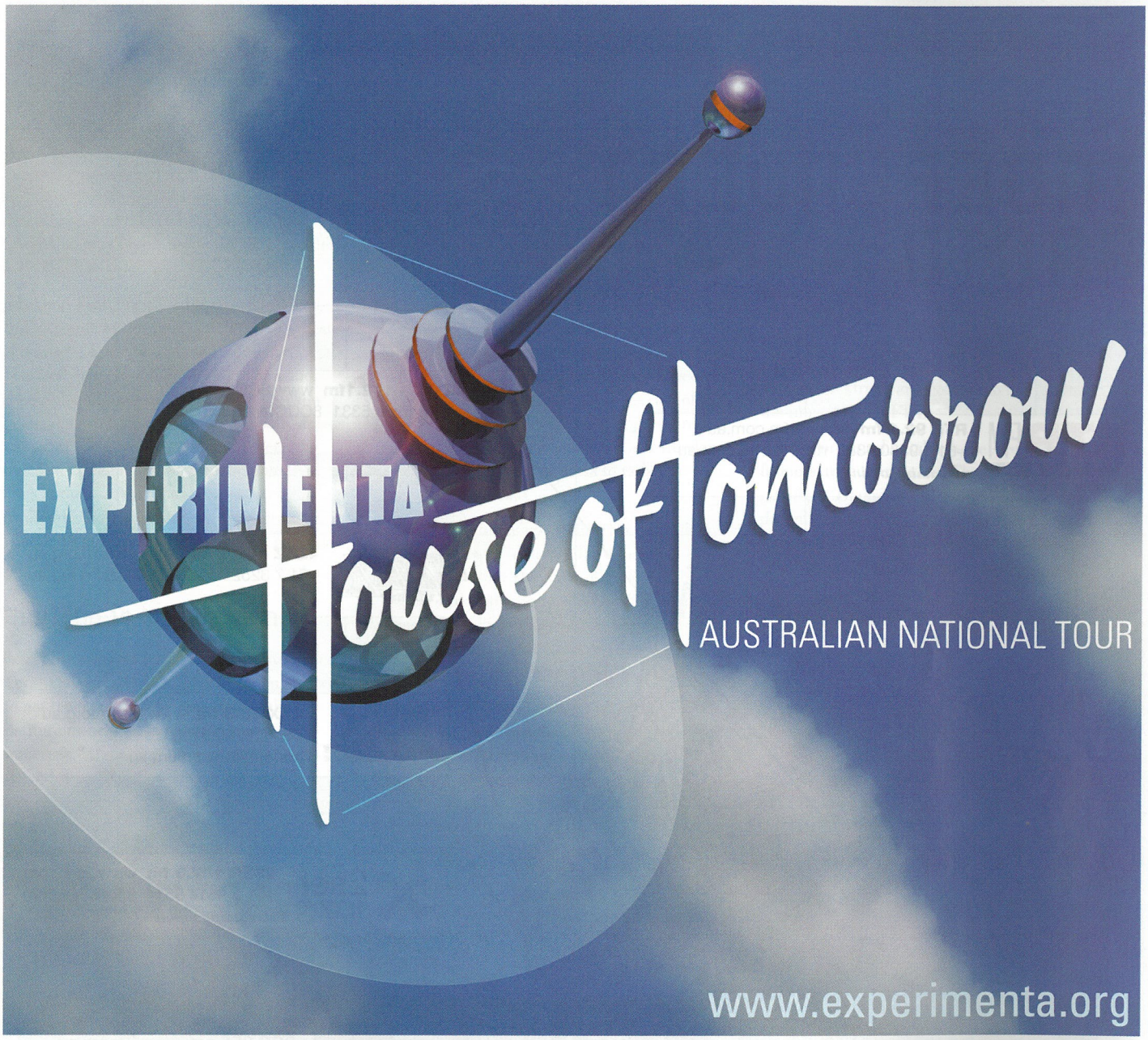

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A Balinese girl at a remembrance ceremony for Bali bombing victims PHOTO: AP/FIRDIA LISNAWATI

ISLAMIC COMMUNITY?

The Australian media is full of reports on Jemaah Islamiyah, yet most Australians know little about the organisation. What kind of threat does it pose? What level of support does it have? What is it calling for? And is Islamic extremism really a religious problem, or a political one, that requires broad-base political solutions?

Sidney Jones is the South East Asian director of the International Crisis Group, a multinational think tank working in conflict prevention. One of the most respected voices on South East Asian terrorism, she is now based in Singapore after being expelled from Indonesia in June this year for her comments on the troubled province of Aceh.

In an interview with MARNI CORDELI, Jones gives a unique insight into Indonesian responses to Jemaah Islamiyah, the effectiveness of the campaign against them, and how — or if — things are likely to change under Indonesia's newly inaugurated president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

Australia and Indonesia have long been problematic neighbours, sharing a history studded with diplomatic mishaps and cultural misunderstanding. Yet since 2002, an entity known as Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) — responsible for the death of 88 Australians on Indonesian soil — has thrown the two countries' governments and law enforcement agencies into forced co-operation like never before.

In early 2002, Australia and Indonesia signed a Memorandum of Understanding on counter-terrorism that provided a framework for intelligence-sharing and possible joint police operations. When the Bali bombing happened in October that year, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) sent a team of investigative and forensic officers to Bali to assist the Indonesian National Police. More than 120 Australian law enforcement personnel were involved in a joint investigation into the bombing. A similar but smaller AFP team was sent to Jakarta after the Australian embassy bombing in September this year.

Despite John Howard's talk of "pre-emptive strikes", Australia's security against terrorist attacks does not rest primarily in the hands of the Australian government. Islamic extremist networks, such as JI, operate for the most part in other sovereign nations — restricting Australia to a mostly 'supportive' role in the work of those nations' local governments and police.

According to Sidney Jones, this is as it should be: "if there are going to be advances on fighting terror in Indonesia, it has to come from within Indonesia."

In Australia, doubts have been expressed over Indonesia's ability to effectively crack down on JI, with some commentators claiming it folly to trust the Indonesians with such a mission — given that country's notorious record on corruption.

But Jones disagrees. "There is a point at which outside pressure to perform actually becomes counter-productive, because then it means that if the Indonesian Government takes any steps it has to worry about being seen as having done so under extreme pressure from outside. It has to be seen to be doing stuff on its own initiative," she says.

"I think that the Australians have already provided an enormous boost, not just to the skills of the Indonesian police, but also to their

Islam and the state

In the earliest stage of Indonesia's independence from the Dutch, there were attempts by Muslim leaders to make the shari`ah (Islamic law) the basis of the Indonesian state — both through the constitution and through more radical means. These attempts failed because of strong opposition from secular nationalists, including Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, and the Indonesian army.

Islamic organisations played an important role in the fight for independence from the Dutch. From early 1948, the struggle in West Java was fought by Muslim guerrillas led by a man by the name of Kartosuwirjo, who came to control vast parts of the province and who spoke of themselves as the Islamic State of Indonesia. Kartosuwirjo's movement — which became known as Darul Islam (DI) — developed into a full-blown rival to the Republic in the 1950s. This reign ended with Kartosuwirjo's capture and the surrender of the other West Javanese leaders in 1962, but the DI movement left a legacy that continues to this day.

When Suharto seized power from Sukarno in 1965, his violent eradication of the Communist Party was aided and supported by many Muslim groups. However, Suharto's New Order regime gave high priority to rapid economic growth, and the existence of rival ideologies and competing political parties was seen as an obstacle to this. Political Islam subsequently became a target of his authoritarian regime.

In the late 1970s, a number of bombings were committed by a small group of Islamic radicals that came to be known as Komando Jihad. Core members of the group appeared to have direct links with the Darul Islam movement. But there are also strong indications that Komando Jihad was in fact a creation of the Indonesian intelligence services, under the direct instructions of Suharto's highest intelligence officer. These violent acts were then used as a means to undermine, persecute and brutally repress active Islamic groups and political parties.

This history lies at the root of the problematic relationship between political Islam and the Indonesian state that exists to this day.

Extracted From: *Islamic State or State Islam? Fifty years of State-Islam relations in Indonesia*. Martin van Bruinessen

own sense of what they can accomplish," Jones continues. "And I think it is that intangible factor that the Australians can help with from behind the scenes: this combination of skill training with professional pride. There is a lot that can be done, but it is about building on that particular model."

DON'T MENTION THE WAR: INDONESIAN RESPONSES TO TERRORISM

"Stories on JI don't sell newspapers in Indonesia the way they do in Australia and the United States," wrote Sidney Jones in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* soon after the Australian embassy bombing in Jakarta. "Most Indonesians have far more pressing things to worry about in terms of their day-to-day existence than when the next explosion might occur."

"Indonesians have tended to see the 'war on terror' not as something that Indonesia should join to make the streets in Jakarta safer, but as a thinly disguised plot to safeguard US interests that has led to the persecution of Muslims around the world."

"Until now, many Indonesians have seen terrorism as a western obsession that has driven all other issues off the table," she continued. "They have tended to see the 'war on terror' not as something that Indonesia should join to make the streets in Jakarta safer, but as a thinly disguised plot to safeguard US interests that has led to the persecution of Muslims around the world."

On the phone from Singapore, Jones clarifies that she believes "the majority by far of the Indonesian population is appalled by [the bombings]." What is concerning, however, is that "even after the embassy bombing in Jakarta, many Indonesians don't believe that an organisation called Jemaah Islamiyah exists, and many of those who do aren't willing to admit it in public."

The words 'jemaah Islamiyah' literally translate to mean 'Islamic community'. The Indonesian Government has not banned JI as an organisation — and has been reluctant to name and take strong action against the group — for fear of this being construed as persecution against the country's devout Muslims. Although this fear might be genuine considering the problematic history of Islam and the Indonesian state **(see: Islam and the state)**, Jones believes that the Megawati former Government allowed the situation to get out of hand.

"The Megawati Government basically let the people around Abu Bakar Bashir (the Muslim cleric believed to be the spiritual leader of JI) control the spin on JI," explains Jones, allowing them to canvass the Indonesian population with the idea that "if you outlaw JI, then you are outlawing the Islamic community."

"So there is this notion now that you can't ban an organisation that has a name that would be offensive to the Muslim community if you outlawed it."

"It's simply idiotic," says Jones. "There are a number of organisations around the world that have the name 'Islamic community' that nobody claims are representative of the populace as a whole. For example you have a party in Pakistan, Jamaat-i-islami: same name, but it's a political party. Nobody in Pakistan suggests that Jamaat-i-islami is representative of the entire Muslim community in Pakistan, let alone the world. Same thing in Egypt, you have Gamaah Islami, which was the group that went after the tourists in Luxor. The outrage that greeted that particular act on the part of the Muslim population, and of course the government, was huge. The fact that it has a name that means Islamic community is irrelevant."

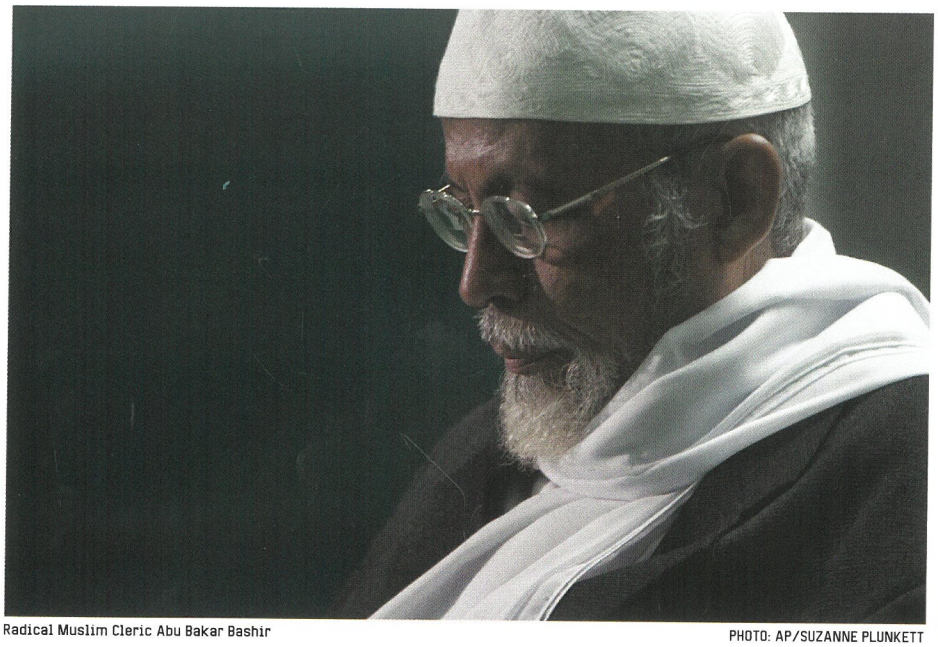
This reluctance to offend the broader Muslim constituency has meant that just what kind of threat JI represents has remained shady in Indonesia. "We've heard vigorous condemnations of terrorism and violence, but the words 'Jemaah Islamiyah' have hardly been mentioned by anyone in authority."

"And if you can't name it, you can't fight it," claims Jones.

USING THE FORCE: POLICE SUCCESSES

Despite the Megawati Government's reluctance to speak out about the issue, Jones believes the police initiative against JI has been effective. "There has been a really unfair slamming of the police," she says. "Yes, they've missed Azahari [Bin Husin] (suspected mastermind of the Marriott Hotel and Australian embassy bombings) on about five occasions, and there have been a number of other instances where the local police blew it. But in general the people working on the counter-terror team have done a great job in rounding up members of this network and they have not done so in a way that raises fears about arbitrary arrests and detention, the way we had in the Suharto years. That was one of my real concerns: that it would be a witch-hunt once these arrests started."

"The problem is that this issue goes beyond law enforcement," says Jones. "It requires a public information campaign, an analysis of ongoing [JI] recruitment efforts; policies designed to steer potential recruits in other directions;



Radical Muslim Cleric Abu Bakar Bashir PHOTO: AP/SUZANNE PLUNKETT

improved anti-corruption measures to stop the sale of arms, passports, and other identity cards; and much else."

"The police have been good in getting people who have been involved in perpetrating past acts of violence, good in trying to go after the network itself, but they need to prove criminal activity in order to keep someone in prison under current laws. If the Indonesian Government banned JI as an organisation, they would be able to detain a broader swathe of people."

Even so, two years on from Bali, Jones believes JI has been seriously weakened. "Many of its leaders are behind bars; its administrative structure, in some areas, is in disarray; its communication and supply lines have been disrupted; and it is short of cash."

"It is true that JI recruitment continues, and some members seem to be preparing their own children and younger siblings to continue the family tradition. But it will be difficult to replace the experience, leadership capacity, and international contacts of the men who built the organisation over the past decade."

A SPLIT IN THE RANKS? INSIDE JEMAAH ISLAMIYAH

The International Crisis Group (ICG) defines Jemaah Islamiyah as a "network of Islamic radicals extending across South East Asia, led by Indonesian nationals".

JI can roughly be divided into three tiers: The top strategists, such as Abu Dujana and Zulkar Naen, are mostly veterans of the anti-Soviet resistance, or more recently, the post-Soviet period in Afghanistan. (Despite this, Jones says it is not true that directives flow from al-Qaeda to JI.) A trusted second tier, mostly with these same credentials, appear to be assigned as field coordinators, responsible for delivering money and explosives and for choosing a local subordinate who can act as a team leader for the foot soldiers.

The bottom tier is made up of the people who drive the cars, survey targets, deliver bombs and most often risk arrest, physical injury or death. They are usually selected just before the attack occurs and are mostly young men from religious boarding schools or Islamic high schools **(see: How are people drawn into the JI network?)**

What is little known in Australia is that there is actually a major split within Jemaah Islamiyah: between a pro- and anti-bombing faction. "The anti-bombing faction is actually bigger, we think, but unfortunately that doesn't make the [bombers] any less dangerous, just because it is a smaller faction," says Jones.

The primary difference between the two factions is their view on "whether or not it is deemed appropriate to go after people who have not been directly responsible for attacks on Muslims," explains Jones. "The argument of the Bali bombers and the kind of Hambali faction is that anybody who is in any way linked to the governments responsible for attacks in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan are fair game; that those people voted for their governments anyway and it doesn't matter whether they are men, women or children."

"But there is a very strong opposition to that take on things within the JI structure, and my guess is that unhappiness with the most recent bombing is going to be such as to, if not completely split the group, at least to deepen the division."

How are people drawn into the JI network?

According to one young man close to those who took part in a training camp run by Bali bombing strategist Imam Samudra, recruitment would begin with a member of Samudra's group striking up a conversation with students from a local high school.

The students would be invited to come to a meeting where the discussion leader showed video CDs about the war in Maluku and Poso, where Muslims were killed by Christians. The videos inevitably produced outrage from the viewers at the brutality and the inhumanity of the Christian side. The viewers were then invited back for religious study sessions.

Students who went through this training learnt formulaic definitions, such as that what Muslims had to fear most was a government enslaved to infidels. The situation in the world today, it was repeatedly stressed, was like the darkness and ignorance prevailing in Mecca before Islam was generally accepted and when Muslims were being persecuted. The group leaders stressed the need to rid the faith of idolatrous practices. But the most important emphasis was on jihad (holy war).

After about four months in the study group, the students would be told that jihad was not just a concept, but something that had to be put into practice, and were invited to join the struggle. Those who chose to would then be trained in the use of firearms and bomb-making.

From: *ICG Asia report number 43: How the Jemaah Islamiyah terrorist network operates.*

Jones says that the two factions are motivated by significantly different things: "I think the bombings themselves are inspired by the 1998 fatwah by Osama bin Laden talking about the need to punish the 'enemies of Islam' for what they have done to Muslims."

"The larger faction within JI is more a descendant of the Darul Islam-types who want to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia. But it's important to note that these are separate aims," says Jones. "The people who are mounting the bombing attacks are not trying to justify them in terms of them being a necessary step in order to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia; they are two separate goals."

"You don't engage with these grievances as a way of turning off terrorism, you engage with them because there are injustices being done."

JI has been linked to dozens of deadly attacks across Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia from 1999 to the present. Until the Bali bombing, the motivation for JI bombings appears to have been revenge for massacres of Muslims by Indonesian Christians in Maluku, North Maluku and Poso, where communal conflict erupted in 1999 and 2000, leading to the deaths of more than 5,000 people and with 700,000 people internally displaced. The first large-scale attacks attributed to JI were in 2000. On Christmas Eve that year more than 30 bombs, all wired to explode at the same time, were delivered to churches or priests in 11 Indonesian cities across six provinces.

But those involved in the US-led 'war on terror' now appear to be the main subjects of JI's wrath. Jones says the Bali bombing is indicative of this shift — and that the nightclub bombing was not targeting Australians specifically, but "generic westerners".

While Australia is a target of JI, Jones believes that this is because we are an "ally of the US" — not because of specific Australian policies or actions. "Every single JI document where Australia is mentioned, it is mentioned in the same breath with the United States. It's the US and its lackeys: usually Britain first, then Australia, Israel and Japan."

CAUSE AND EFFECT: WHAT DRIVES JI

Broadly speaking, says Jones, "JI sees 'the US and its lackeys', as the phrase goes, as embarked on a campaign to persecute Muslims so as to ensure that a Christian Zionist-dominated government keeps Islam weak. To back this claim, they point to the slaughter of Muslims primarily in Palestine and the occupied territories, Iraq and Afghanistan; but then for good measure they bring in Kashmir, Chechnya, Bosnia, Somalia and a number of other places."

But while these same grievances are outlined by many who join groups such as JI, Jones believes that they are not a sufficient explanation for why people join: "You can talk to any Muslim, and in fact even non-Muslims in Indonesia, and they are going to have exactly the same set of grievances. They are going to be extremely upset about the treatment of civilians — and Muslims in particular — in all of these areas, but most of them would not dream of turning to violence to express that grievance."

"So while [this set of grievances] is a factor, it is certainly not a sufficient factor in trying to figure out why people go into these organisations; and there you really have to look at the backgrounds of the people who go in. It is less the specific grievances that drive them than it is a combination of family background, specific indoctrination, educational setting, and the broader international climate."

Similarly, says Jones, while it's important that these grievances are engaged by the west, "you don't engage with them as a way of turning off terrorism. You engage with these grievances because there are injustices being done. And therefore I think paying far more attention to resolving the Middle East conflict should be high on the agenda of everybody, regardless of whether you think there is a link to terrorism or not. Making sure that civilians don't get killed in Iraq should be the priority of everybody, regardless of whether or not there is a link to terrorism."

STEMMING THE TIDE: SOLUTIONS

So what can be done to stem the tide of recruits to Islamic extremism across Indonesia and the region? Jones advocates that the problem be approached from the source up. "[We need] to think about how to prevent young adults from being attracted to martyrdom and how to channel the energies of would-be jihadists into more constructive pursuits than making bombs."

"It may also require tough action against a few institutions," she continues. "When you can identify a small number of schools that are producing a disproportionate share of bombers — and there are at least two of them: Ngruki in Solo and Darul Syahada in Boyolali — then you have to say: okay, we have a problem here, what do we do about it? It may not be simply shutting the school down but it certainly means, for example, ensuring that there is strict government monitoring of those schools. It means gradually increasing the number of faculties to ensure that they take on teachers who are at least able to provide some kind of an antidote — although the problem is less the curriculum and the teaching than it is the kind of recruitment processes that take place there."

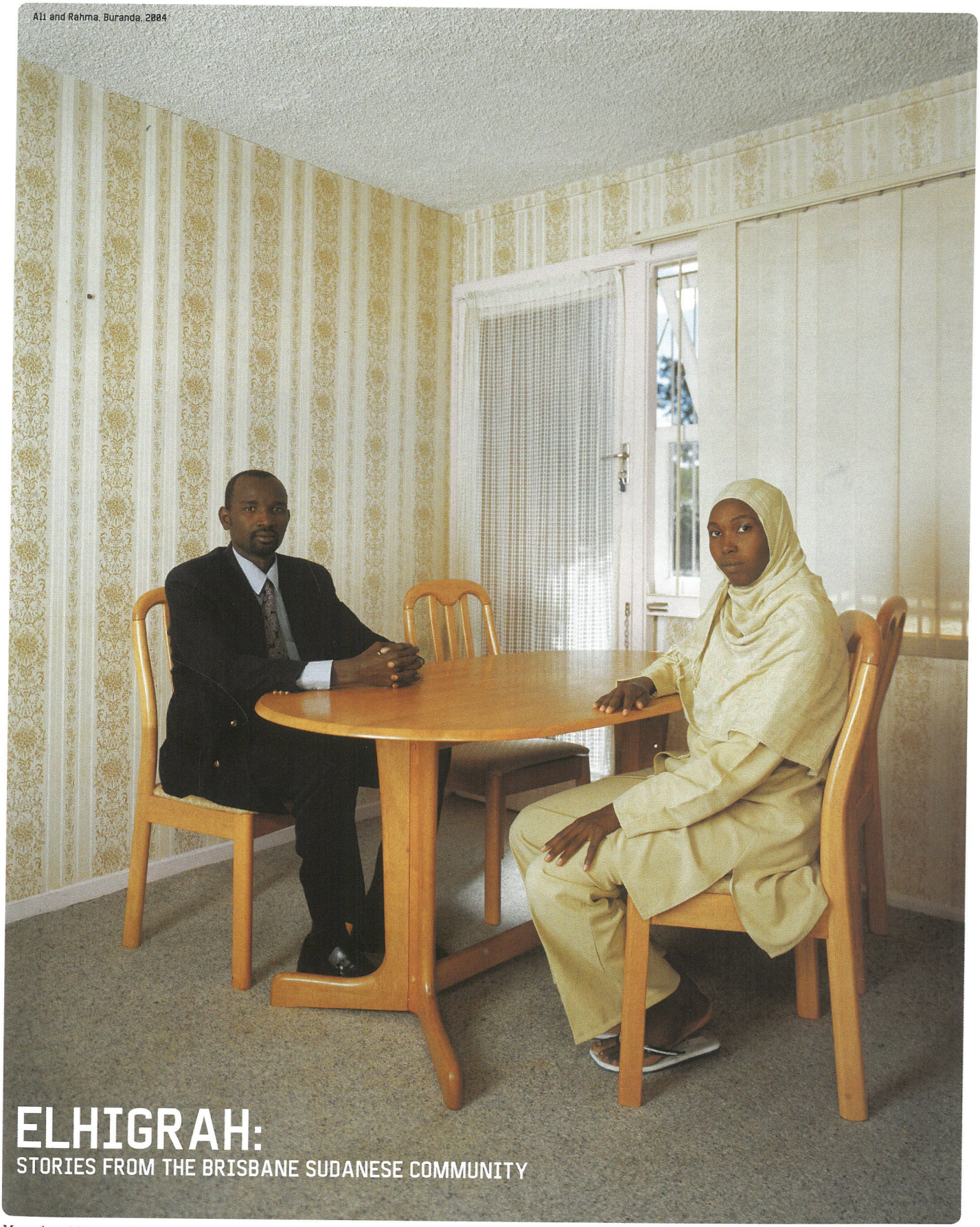
A major obstacle to effectively undermining JI is also the Indonesian Government's response to the organisation. In order to take a strong stand on Islamic extremism — to publicly separate JI the group from the actual Muslim community — Jones believes that Indonesia needs a leader "who is known as being personally devout, and has unquestioned Muslim credentials — and Megawati didn't have that." Indonesia's new president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono does, says Jones: "I think he would have credibility to come out forcefully and say: these are the steps we need to take — from banning the organisation, to effectively taking action against a very small number of schools that produce a disproportionate number of bombers, to actually trying to put together a policy that would address this issue of where some of the young foot soldiers are being recruited for various JI activities."

But in order to do that, says Jones, "he has to explain his actions and the rationale for those actions to the Indonesian public, and to this day, nobody has come out and explained what JI is to the Indonesian population, because of this reluctance to offend the domestic Muslim political constituency."

"I think Yudhoyono could do that, if he had the will..."

Does he have the will? "I don't know," says Jones. "We'll have to wait and see."

MARNI CORDELL IS CO-EDITOR OF *SPINACH7* MAGAZINE.



ELHIGRAH:
STORIES FROM THE BRISBANE SUDANESE COMMUNITY

More than 20 years of civil war has devastated Sudan, displacing over four million people. Scattered and resettled around the world, they now call new places home. 'Elhigrah' is the Arabic word for migration. In *Elhigrah*, an upcoming exhibition at the Museum of Brisbane, CASSANDRA MATHIE documents eight households within the 3,000 strong Brisbane Sudanese community.

Keiji Family, Stafford, 2004

Dut Family, Aspley, 2004

Abdelrahman Family, Marooka, 2004

This series of portraits was commissioned by the Museum of Brisbane for the exhibition Elhigrah: Stories from the Brisbane Sudanese Community, *26 November 2004 to 6 February 2005.* CASSANDRA MATHIE is a Brisbane-based documentary photographer. Over the past six years she has travelled extensively and worked in the Balkans, the Caucasus, Turkey, Iran, Lebanon, Pakistan and most recently, Mongolia.

ANNI THE BRAVE

PHOTOS BY RÉGIS MARTIN

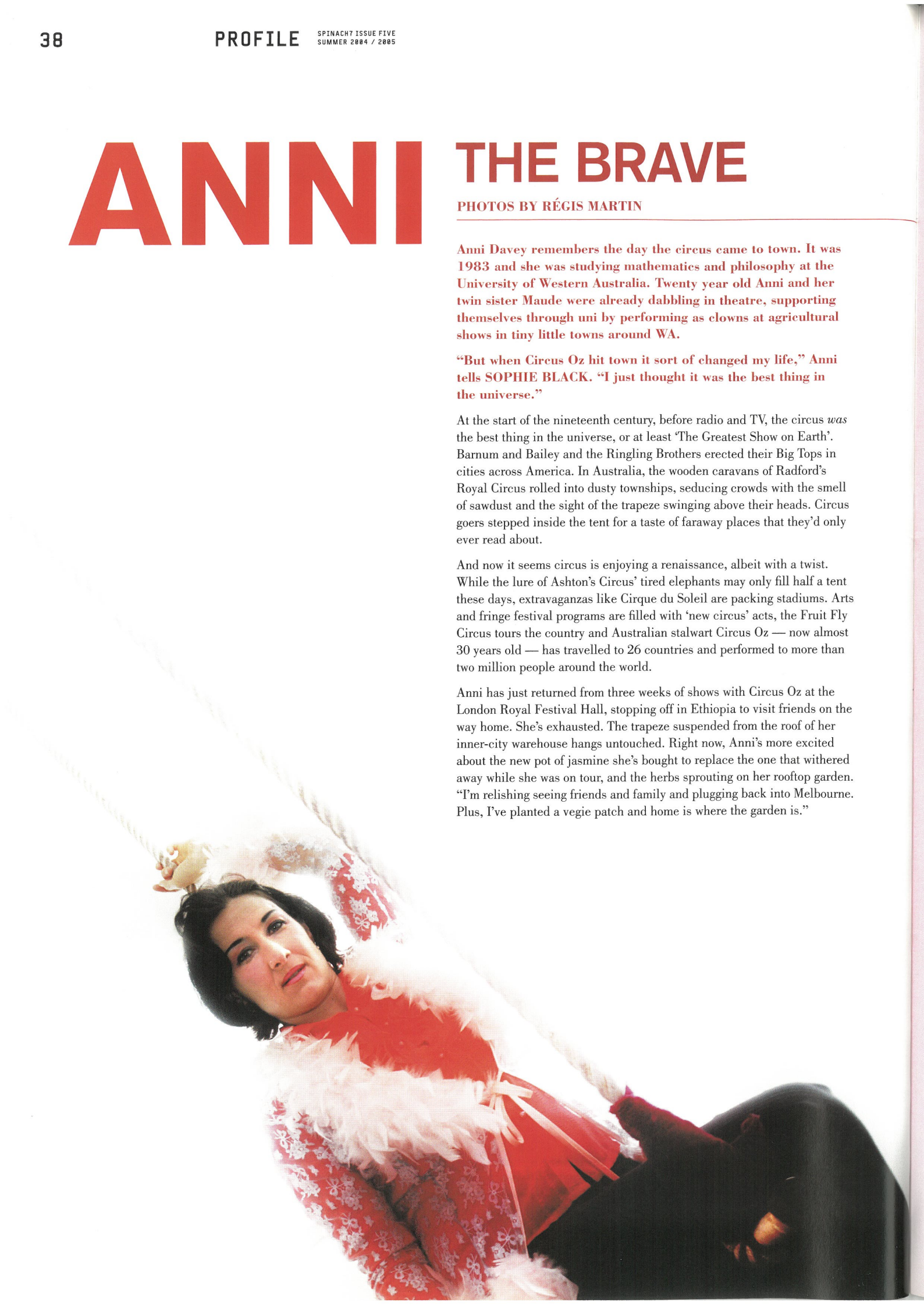
Anni Davey remembers the day the circus came to town. It was 1983 and she was studying mathematics and philosophy at the University of Western Australia. Twenty year old Anni and her twin sister Maude were already dabbling in theatre, supporting themselves through uni by performing as clowns at agricultural shows in tiny little towns around WA.

"But when Circus Oz hit town it sort of changed my life," Anni tells SOPHIE BLACK. "I just thought it was the best thing in the universe."

At the start of the nineteenth century, before radio and TV, the circus *was* the best thing in the universe, or at least 'The Greatest Show on Earth'. Barnum and Bailey and the Ringling Brothers erected their Big Tops in cities across America. In Australia, the wooden caravans of Radford's Royal Circus rolled into dusty townships, seducing crowds with the smell of sawdust and the sight of the trapeze swinging above their heads. Circus goers stepped inside the tent for a taste of faraway places that they'd only ever read about.

And now it seems circus is enjoying a renaissance, albeit with a twist. While the lure of Ashton's Circus' tired elephants may only fill half a tent these days, extravaganzas like Cirque du Soleil are packing stadiums. Arts and fringe festival programs are filled with 'new circus' acts, the Fruit Fly Circus tours the country and Australian stalwart Circus Oz — now almost 30 years old — has travelled to 26 countries and performed to more than two million people around the world.

Anni has just returned from three weeks of shows with Circus Oz at the London Royal Festival Hall, stopping off in Ethiopia to visit friends on the way home. She's exhausted. The trapeze suspended from the roof of her inner-city warehouse hangs untouched. Right now, Anni's more excited about the new pot of jasmine she's bought to replace the one that withered away while she was on tour, and the herbs sprouting on her rooftop garden. "I'm relishing seeing friends and family and plugging back into Melbourne. Plus, I've planted a vegie patch and home is where the garden is."



"Sometimes my greatest fear is that my fear of heights isn't enough to stop me doing something stupid."

Since sitting in the audience of Circus Oz those 20-odd years ago, Anni's career has taken her all around the world as a street performer, singer, actor and acrobat. She and Maude had always taken part in music and theatre at their alternative schools. Fremantle in those days "was a hippy town", she says, with the second largest Orange (Sanyassan) community in the world and a thriving arts enclave, thanks in part to the proliferation of arts grants that were doled out under Whitlam's watch. "Perth is just so far away from everything," says Anni. "And that isolation can be good for very creative people. But if you're ambitious you have to get out, and Maudie and I were always very ambitious."

After ditching her maths degree and an eight month stint with youth theatre group SWY she moved to Sydney. Anni was offered a job with Sydney group Death Defying Theatre, performing on the street for free. "In the 80s 'community arts' was the buzz word," says Anni. "It was about going into working situations — factories, coal mines — and reflecting the experiences of the people who worked there. We conducted workshops with kids in the housing commission flats of Sydney and performed at festivals, schools and prisons. We were trying to get culture from, and to, the masses."

Throughout her career Anni has always railed against the idea of being a straight actor: "You're spoon-fed ideas by a grand visionary and you can't have any ideas of your own because they just get in the way. [Whereas] the work that I've always done has been devised by myself. That's part of why Circus Oz was so appealing." Death Defying Theatre started running workshops in conjunction with Circus Oz and Anni sat in the audience night after night. "They would be up on the trapeze doing these extraordinary things but they looked like you or me, they made it look easy. It was like an invitation to try it," she says. "And they had a sense of humour about it, they were taking the piss."

Anni hung around. She trailed after women dressed in glittering costumes who could balance three eggs on a spoon on their nose while standing on another woman's shoulders. She idolised them. "But they were so mean! They completely iced me. But the boys were okay. They let me and my friend have a beer with them in their caravan after the show."

After watching their every move for months, Anni finally got a gig and ran away with the circus at the age of 25. They toured Australia, including Arnhem Land, then Edinburgh and Dublin.

By then, Circus Oz had been going strong for 10 years. The founding members of Circus Oz loved the skills and tricks of traditional circus but wanted to make a new sort of show that a contemporary audience could relate to, adding elements of rock'n'roll, popular theatre, social comment and satire. The principles at the heart of the original Circus Oz philosophy are still reflected in their performances today: collective ownership and creation, gender equity, a uniquely Australian signature, and teamwork. "Back then we were this alternative, new political sort of thing," says Anni. "It's much harder to be radical these days 'cause a lot of the battles have been fought and won (or lost!). But back then a man standing on a woman's shoulders was a statement in itself."

Anni jumped from juggling, singing, acting and tumbling to the trapeze a year later. To her, it wasn't such a big leap. "Now people think, 'Look, she doesn't have a gymnast's body and she's too tall and she's got a big bum, but she can do all those things'." Anni loves to show the audience what ordinary people, like themselves, are capable of. "It's important to persuade people that they can do extraordinary things too. It's even more important if 'ordinary' for people is oppression or violence... if you can convince them that they can be extraordinary then that's changing the world."

With Anni and Maudie dolls.

As an acrobatics teacher Anni's worked with The Women's Circus, school kids and corporate clients. She's helped suits to edge off their perch, close their eyes and jump. "It's really great because you get a bunch of people who've never even worn a tracksuit in front of each other for starters. It's so empowering to realise what your body can do. Most people never get that experience. They're little triumphs. To feel like you've done something, beaten something, got somewhere."

Anni believes many people have lost a connection with their bodies. And that's one reason why circus is popular again. Back in the days of Barnum and Bailey, people sat glued to their seats gaping at exotic elephants and lions, freaks and people from strange lands — these were the 'Wonders of the World'. These days, the wonders of the world are channelled into the living room through the remote while people sit glued to the couch. We're leading increasingly sedentary lifestyles, heads bowed over desks, hands at the keyboard. "Everyone is so detached from their bodies. A 13 year old from one of my workshops couldn't even touch his toes. It's so sad. So if you can get a visceral experience at the circus, after sitting in front of the computer all day, then, shit, that's something."

Anni feels the audience travel with her every time she performs. "If you watch people doing trapeze, you automatically swing with them. It makes you feel things that you don't understand. I want to shift people from one space to another."

In 1991 an accident left Anni in traction for five months and out of action for two years. While performing an aerial act at a press call in Edinburgh, her foot loop snapped — she broke her neck and both wrists. "I felt pretty invincible before it happened. But the accident never made me feel helpless and I certainly didn't sit on the couch, watch TV and get depressed. Healing is really hard work. It's like another physical and mental challenge."

"It's important to persuade people that they can do extraordinary things too."

Anni acted as tour manager of Circus Oz and kept up her performances with her a cappella singing group Crying In Public Places. Formed with sister Maude along with two other performers, the group sold out shows in Australia and overseas with songs centred "about the when, what, why, where, and how of tears". Their themes — personal risks and choices, vulnerabilities, emotions and the everyday — resonated with theatre-loads of people. "We were talking about the experiences of women without any reference to men. It wasn't a deliberate decision. We were just being ourselves."

The hardest challenge for Anni after the accident was convincing people to let her perform again with Circus Oz — it took 10 years. While she waited for people to come round to the idea of a comeback, Anni founded another troupe with three women called Club Swing, which did a trapeze act about food and sex called *Appetite*. Taking to the trapeze again was like getting back on a bike. "Fear is relative. You're scared of what you don't know. But a healthy respect for heights is very important. Sometimes my greatest fear is that my fear of heights isn't enough to stop me doing something stupid."

Just the other day Anni came out of her harness while doing a routine forward somersault in the air— she'd forgotten to buckle it properly. "I'm not scared at 10 metres in the air. Sometimes I have to think, 'Anni… if you fall you'll kill yourself. Don't let go.'"

But just because Anni doesn't know terror in the air doesn't mean she's entirely fearless. "As I get older, and as I've done it more and more, I sometimes get so fucking scared of walking out in front of the audience. Opening night in Melbourne this year I was sick with fear. I'm scared that one day someone is going to stand up in the middle of the audience and point at me and say 'You're not really a trapeze artist!' And I'll say, 'You're right! I've been faking it for years!'"

"I think everybody's scared of everything really aren't they? A lot of people cope with that by finding… a partner and having babies, or not having babies and becoming closer with a circle of friends who don't threaten you and who forgive your eccentricities. Some people move to the country and live alone. I sit at home and think, 'I can't go to the meeting of my local residents group because they're all doctors and lawyers and they're so much better at fighting this development than I am, I'm just a bloody acrobat.'"

A life spent on the road means Anni has had one too many plants die on her. Which is why she relishes ordinary routine when she gets home to her boyfriend, family and friends. "I love what I do but it's a double-edged sword. Acrobatics is hard on your body, and it's hard on your relationships. The touring is exhausting and inexorable and a grind, and you're never at home. You have to sacrifice a lot of stuff. All you want to do is stay home and plant your jasmine, move your pot plants, pay the bills on time. All the little things."

But Anni can't imagine a life without performing. After all, it's not the rush of adrenaline or the wind in her hair that keeps her climbing the ladder night after night. "Nah. The main motivator is the applause: 1,200, 2,500 people clap at you every night. It's pretty cool. In London. In New York. It's pretty bloody great."

SOPHIE BLACK IS A MELBOURNE-BASED WRITER.

HELLO WORLD

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LOOK WHAT I FOUND

VANESSA BERRY explores the allure of "lost and forgotten scraps".

Weird post-it note requests. Xenophobic rants scrawled on 20 dollar notes. Crumpled love letters. A photo of a glassy-eyed girl modelling a kimono. A note attached to the string of a deflated helium balloon.

Once you start looking, you realise that the streets are full of these lost and forgotten scraps. One might stick to your shoe, one might catch your eye while you are staring into the hedge beside the bus stop. It may be poking out of a bin and make you glance around to see if you are observed, before sticking your hand in and grabbing it.

Or it might start like this.

One night a friend brought home a box of photographs he'd found beside the road, among a pile of discarded furniture. There was also a diary, which belonged to the girl in the photos, a tousle-haired blonde who was most often pictured posing in a swimsuit. We took turns reading the diary, which flatly documented gym visits, dinners and sexual episodes — although to our great frustration she was never more specific than "made love". Despite the factual, unvarying content, the diary fascinated and perplexed us. Through the act of being found, it opened up innumerable possibilities about her life and how her things ended up on the footpath along with broken fans and a mouldy futon mattress.

For Jason Bitner it started at work. "I was hired at the local recycling centre to help folks unload their bottles and cans and newspapers from their cars every Saturday morning. One of our tasks was separating the glossy ads from the rest of the newspaper. It started out as a really tedious job, until we started reading all these other notes and handwritten scraps included in the piles. We'd grab anything that looked interesting and set it aside for our breaks. There'd always be one note that stood out from the rest for that week and there was a sense of pride that we'd saved it from the heaps."

Jason, along with friend Davy Rothbart, started *Found*, an American magazine and website that displays found notes, letters and the occasional pressed toad skin (found in a secondhand book). Every year they receive thousands of contributions from all over the world. Anything they don't feature in their magazine or website they use to personalise the covers of their subscribers' magazines. "Nothing goes to waste," he explains. "We're not so much collectors, as people scrounging for trash and glimpses of other people's lives."

The creator of the Australian *Object Not Found* website, Damien Frost, is similarly reticent to call himself a collector. "I feel more comfortable calling myself an 'acquirer' or even just curator, because I do see the site as being a museum of memories." The ownership and status aspect of most collections doesn't apply with found notes or photographs. They're items without monetary value and their acquisition cannot be controlled or predicted.

For the people who amass these scraps of other people's lives, it's all about stories.

I spent years gathering shopping lists, intrigued by their variety and subtle differences. It was a collection that could never be complete; once I started looking I found them frequently and friends who worked in supermarkets had an endless supply to donate. When I realised I had more than a thousand, I made a pact with myself to write a story for every one. Soon feeling overwhelmed I stopped at thirty and it became my zine *Shopping List Stories*.

for dinne

Browsing through archives such as *Found* and *Object Not Found* it's impossible to suppress the urge to construct the lives of the people behind the items. They're like Rorschach tests. Everyone will come up with a slightly different explanation for a photograph of a girl wearing a 'Boys Cheat' T-shirt standing at a lookout, or an enraged note from the gutter:

"All fucking day you grand master of all idiots. You are lucky your car is still alive. Next time you secure your car use your head or borrow one brainless. Truly your roapable neighbour."

Divorced from their original context, found items are open to endless interpretation and an explanation would in most cases be disappointingly mundane. Through being found and arranged in a new context, they are given a new glamorous life which Damien describes: "When you project a story onto a photo, it's always tempting to think up some sort of elaborate and twisted state of affairs or riveting background story involving the subjects in the pictures."

Projects involving the discards of famous people have far less charm and mystery. I'm thinking of the work of French photographers Pascal Rostain and Bruno Mouron, who have spent 14 years collecting and photographing celebrity garbage. Madonna's squashed Cocoa Pebbles box speaks much less to me than a creased photograph of a girl being kissed on both cheeks by boys in matching blue sweaters.

Sometimes, despite their anonymity, they're uncomfortably familiar. Years after I read the aspiring model's diary, I found another collection of a girl's relics among a pile of rubbish. The contents of the suitcase reminded me of the mementoes I found important in my early twenties: in one envelope were love letters from a boyfriend, along with wrapping paper from the gifts he gave her and little inconsequential notes. Her diary was one of those ubiquitous black and red notebooks, and inside she wrote of her life in share-houses in the inner city, her body image problems, her difficulties with drugs.

I felt uncomfortably voyeuristic reading these relics. My flatmate was convinced the girl had died, while I believed she had fled the city due to some crime or scandal. Curiosity got the better of us and we used clues from the suitcase to track her down. She lived only a few suburbs away, she probably even shopped at the same supermarket as us. Should we return it? How would she feel knowing we'd gone through it? We decided she'd be creeped out by the return of the suitcase, and I kept it.

A few 'found object' websites have reconciliation as their motive — such as http://www.isthisyou.co.uk, which seeks to reunite people with their lost photos — but mostly finds are presented as anonymous curiosities. *Found* magazine makes sure that any identifiers such as addresses or phone numbers are removed from the items they publish. The randomness and obscurity of the collection never gives you the feeling that the people behind the notes and photographs are being exploited.

For the creator of http://ifoundsomeofyourlife.blogspot.com, however, ethical concerns caused him to cease his project. He found the memory card from a digital camera in a taxi, and decided to publish one photo every day from the 227 contained on it, and in doing so build up a profile of the owner. The site was taken down prematurely and replaced with a vague apology: "I never set out to hurt or embarrass anyone." Rumour has it that the creator of the site was threatened with lawsuits. Now the URL links to an error message: the pictures have been lost again.

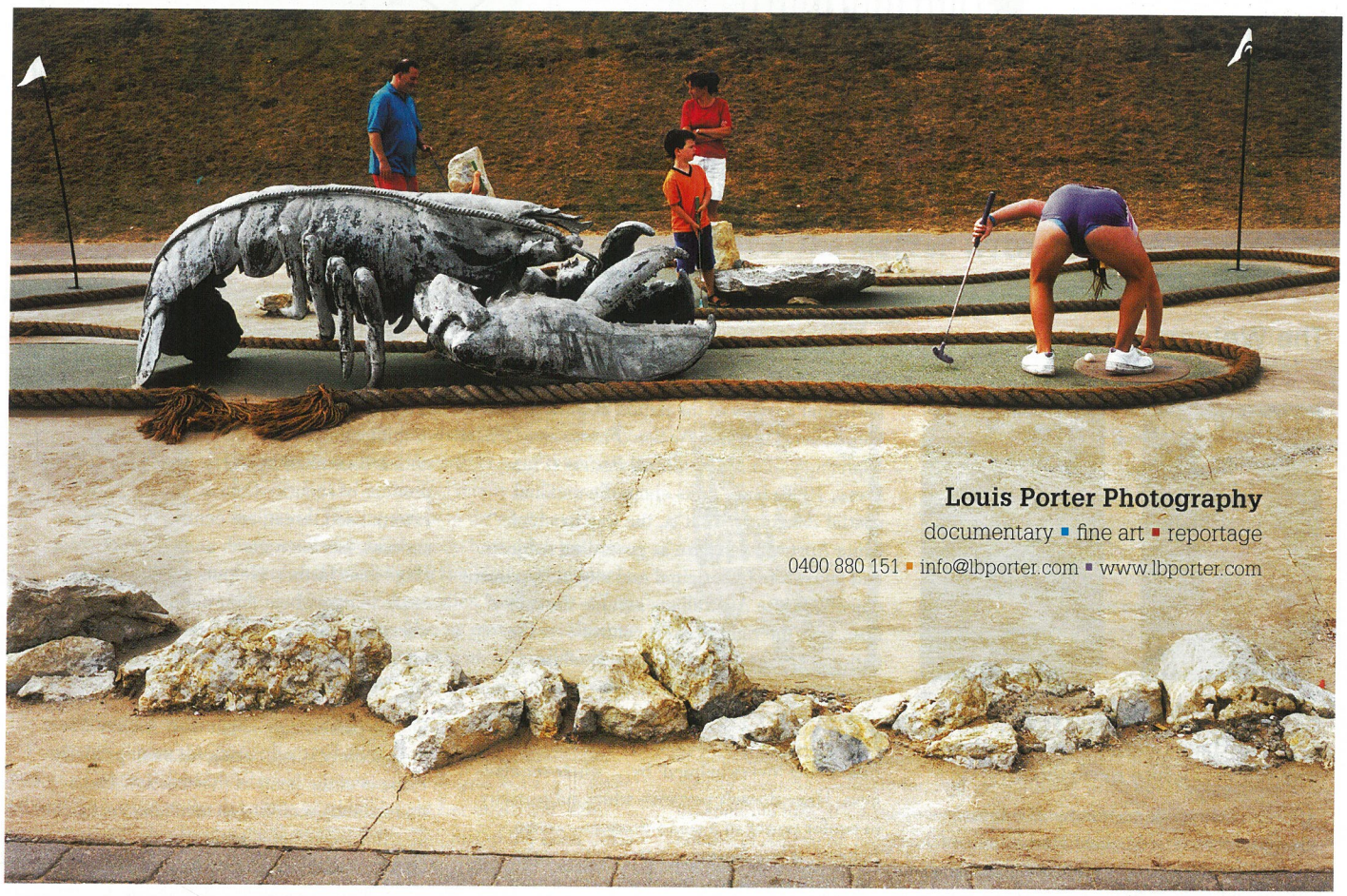
Perhaps this website went wrong by providing more than just a glimpse into someone else's life. Damien likens the interest in found things to the urge to peek into people's houses on summer nights, when the lights are on, the doors open and it's easy to see in.

Among the fragments, there is the occasional item that strikes you as strongly as a perfectly crafted story. You don't need much. Jason's favourite is a scrap of paper he found wedged into a fence that reads: "I love you. Yes. Yes. Yes."

And mine? A photo of a wedding reception from the 70s or 80s. The decor is drab and the table is studded with plastic cups of beer. From the look of the room it's obvious they must not have had much money for the wedding. One unfortunate young man at the back of the group has giant sweat stains in the armpits of his baby blue shirt. The guests are assembled neatly, apart from a woman in the foreground who is violently waving her hands with a look of terror.

VANESSA BERRY WRITES THE ZINE *I AM A CAMERA*. PAST ZINES INCLUDE *LAUGHTER AND THE SOUND OF TEACUPS*, *SHOPPING LIST STORIES*, AND *VINNIES*.

http://www.foundmagazine.com
http://www.renewal.org.au/object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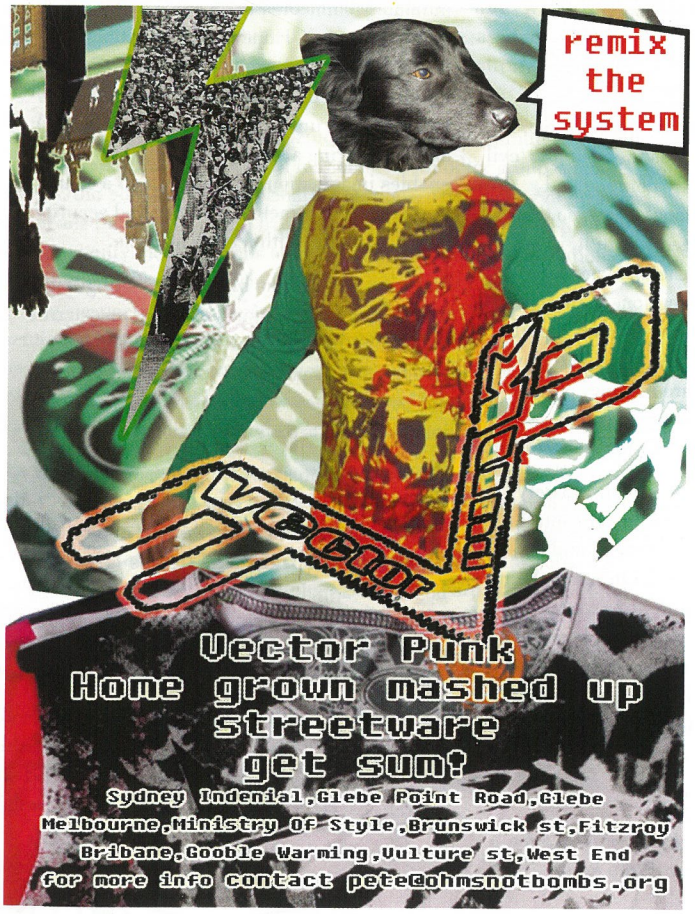
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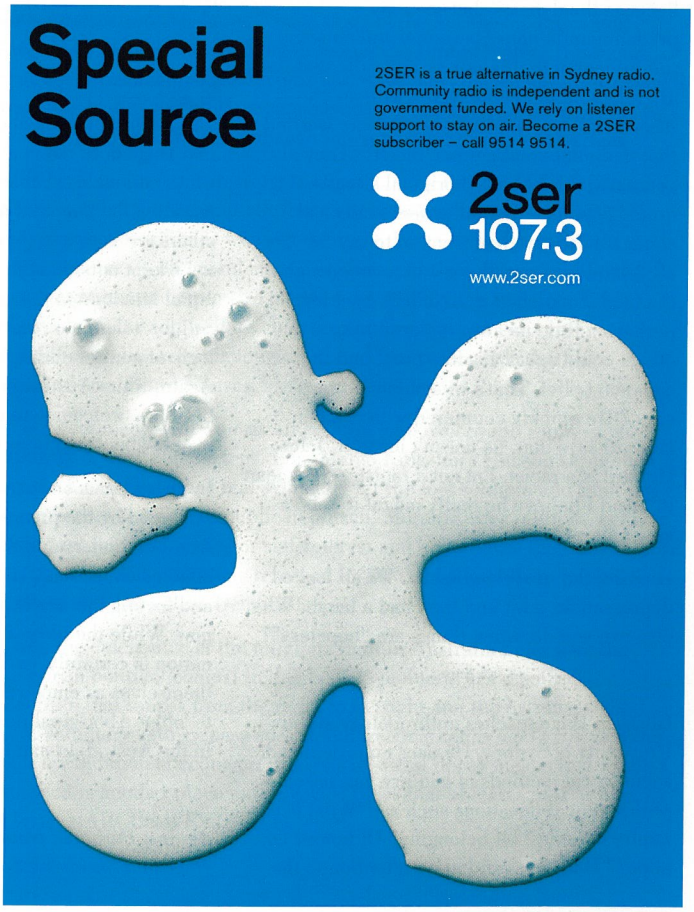
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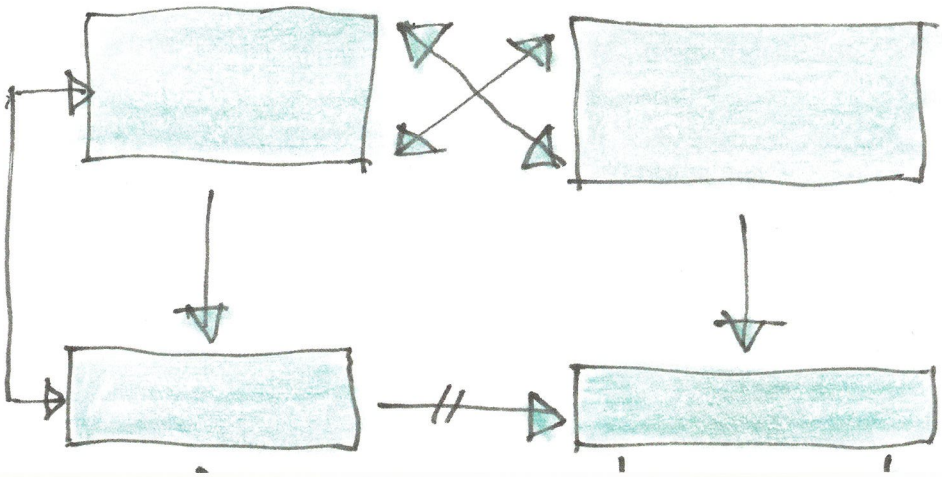

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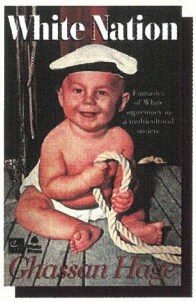

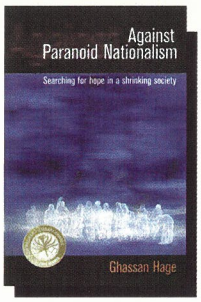

EVE VINCENT has been re-reading Ghassan Hage (and probably reading way too much into everything).

After a recent guest lecture by Aboriginal sovereignty activist Michael Mansell one of my students expressed a strong fear that such talk was "divisive". This surprised me, if only because the dynamic between my predominantly non-Aboriginal students and the subject of their study is generally that they are reluctant to ever disagree with an Aboriginal opinion, because they are worried that that might make them 'racist'. (They also, generally, think the "Aboriginal situation" is quite "hopeless"; and they feel really sad about it.) This student went on to say "we are all Australian" and there was room enough in the idea of nation "for all of us". Seeking, perhaps a little meanly, to derail him so that others could speak I said, "Sure, and that's a common belief. That's what John Howard says." He quickly countered with: "When Howard says that, he doesn't mean it. John Howard is a racist. I'm not a racist, and I mean it." And I believe he really meant it to be a generous gesture.

Howard, the re-elected racist. We all looked depressed for a bit and then had a laugh. What else can you do, when things are "hopeless"?

***

Ghassan Hage teaches anthropology at the University of Sydney. He uses empirical and sociological methods of enquiry, but poses philosophical questions such as, "What is the nature of being? Of belonging? Of home? Of hope?" Hage has paid close attention to the particular version of the nation at work in the Howard era. In *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (Pluto Press, 1998) Hage talks about the national spatial imaginary. That is, the way in which white Australians figure as governing subjects, and non-white (Aboriginal and migrant), passive objects. White Australians assume the role of host, with the right to exert control over the national space; it is an *exclusively* white prerogative to decide, "Who it is that will come to this country"; it's white Australia's role to keep a 'balance' in check: to keep whiteness from being 'overwhelmed' by… whatever elseness. Hage doesn't perceive white subjectivity to confer power in a socio-economic sense. Instead, *White Nation*, written in the wake of One Nation's ascent, sees that many white people have been edged to the margins of an aggressive society: a loss of control has reinvigorated the colonial fantasy of white dominance.

The important thing about this work, for me, is that Hage does not confine his theorising to 'evil white nationalists', zealously defining and guarding the bounded national space, so that others are kept out, (or caged within it, in order to be kept outside of it). Instead, Hage pays equal attention to the assumptions of those who call for 'tolerance'. Hage demonstrates that the logic of control underpins this position too. Again, white Australians are the ones able to bestow a 'welcome', to wrangle with other white people about practices of inclusion or exclusion.

In my students on that day, I saw the anxiety produced by the prospect of a loss of control. And I do understand them to reflect, and be affected by, as I am, the ways of thinking, being and feeling that are available in Australia right now. While the idea of keeping people out of the nation is certainly 'evil' to them, they also see themselves as empowered to gesture generously, to 'offer' Aboriginal people their 'rightful' share in the Australian nation.

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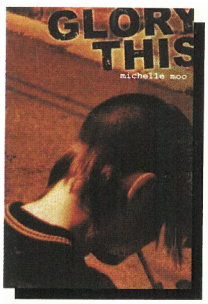
Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society (Pluto Press, 2003) is a mostly convincing diagnosis of the state of things three terms in. Hage depicts a nation consumed by worry. That fear, and the promise of security from an invoked and externalised threat, are central to Howard's success, has been much analysed. However, Hage goes further. He puts it that citizens cease to care about their nation and start to worry when the answer to the question "Does my society care about me?" is "I don't know." Or: "Are you fucken kidding?"

People cannot care about their society when their society is not caring for them properly. Hope is at the heart of this treatise. Hage understands societies as mechanisms for the distribution of hope, and "that the kind of affective attachment (worrying or caring) that a society creates among its citizens is intimately connected to its capacity to distribute hope". Hope is variously defined: as a sap to the 'masses' — a deferral of joy; as the very limited hope attached to social mobility (how uninspiring is Latham's ladder); and as enjoying a kind of security that enables imagination, generosity, and a share in aspiring for something better. And security is to do, in turn, with feeling at home.

So I note that with no big threats sailing into 'our' waters this election campaign, no external menace to the nation, or collective home, the all-crucial mortgage belt voted the way they did because they were *worried* about an internal threat, to their individual home… loan.

There's no greater unsettling question to non-Aboriginal Australia's sense of security, belonging and home, than the *fact* of prior Aboriginal ownership. And I guess I should be less disappointed that when Aboriginal political leaders such as Mansell assert that sovereignty was never ceded, therefore Aboriginal ownership remains a contemporary fact; the anxiety index shoots up. Mansell's is a marginal voice. Perhaps, he concedes, even within the Aboriginal political scene. I reckon he's crucial for the reason he's often criticised: in articulating a 'utopian' vision, he dares generate hope.

Glory This
Michelle Moo
Local Consumption Publications



Local Consumption Publications (LCP) is a small independent publisher that has recently been revived after a decade or so of hibernation. Loosely linked to the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), its aim is to do what small independent publishers do best: pick up texts considered too risky for the big multinationals that dominate the Australian book trade. *Glory This* was written by Moo as part of her Masters at UTS and is the first title on LCP's list since its resurrection.

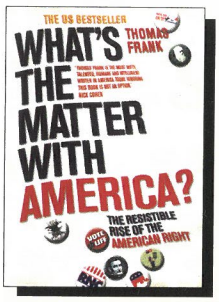
This novella is set in the late 70s in outer suburban south-east Melbourne — Frankston (Franga), Cheltenham (Chelty), the infamous Chadstone Shopping Centre (Chaddy) all make appearances. Mayne is 15, a Sharpie and at the opening of the narrative has just caught her boyfriend Nafe getting it on with his best mate Flats at a party. The rest of the book deals with the ramifications of this event for Mayne and her group of friends. Thankfully Moo avoids subjecting Nafe and Flats to the all too predictable fate of ostracism and a brutally efficient poofter bashing. While the possibility of violent punishment is never entirely erased, encounters such as those between Nafe and Flats do not seem to be entirely foreign to the world of the Sharpies.

It's the Sharpie world that Moo depicts so well — the minute details of preening, and the strict protocol for contact with other groups such as the Bowies, the Surfies and other Sharpie factions. The shaving of eyebrows and heads (leaving tails and fringe), the makeup, the clothes, the tatts, all work to signify intricate webs of group affiliations and disaffiliation. It is a combination that makes them look "like a different kind of animal" (perhaps especially on Franga beach on a 30 degree day). School is barely mentioned and the adult world doesn't really figure in this story — none of the character's parents enter the action in any significant way. They exist only as shadowy, slightly ominous characters in the background, the distributors of various types of violence.

The specifics of Sharpie culture are punctuated by common clichés of suburban teen angst. Long, hot and boring summer days are filled by chain-smoking Winnie Reds, drinking cheap goon, wandering the streets or driving around in cars, and giving boys two minute hand jobs. The dialogue is sparse, funny, sometimes almost too sharp, and there is stiff competition for the title of most blasé and disaffected youth. Friendships wane and others intensify — Mayne's relationship with Snigs always threatening to tip over into something more.

Glory This does not charge on through the teen years to come out the other side with glib platitudes. Instead, it signs off on a scene like so many in the book, with Mayne and her gang wandering the streets in a daze following an all night bender. SARAH TAYTON

What's The Matter with America? The Resistible Rise of the American Right
Thomas Frank
Metropolitan Books



Nothing resonates in *What's The Matter With America?* as much as the decay. The boarded up streets of rural Kansas don't seem so far away. Their ubiquitous 'Antique' shops — where townsfolk sell their treasures to tourists and pick over each other's detritus — seem straight out of Newcastle West or Pauline Hanson's country Queensland. That particular legacy of globalisation is everywhere that's off the map.

Thomas Frank, the sharp witted editor of *The Baffler* magazine and author of *One Market Under God* and *The Conquest of Cool* has turned his attention to his home state of Kansas. It's a place he clearly loves, is nostalgic for, and sympathises with, but it profoundly disappoints him. It's a microcosm of the American condition. Once a hotbed of American progressives, Populism and anti-slavery movements it's now Bush territory. It's where the poorest county in America voted Dubya in 2000 by a margin of four to one.

In Kansas, Frank has found a case study of the backlash politics that Republicans have ridden to power across the United States. The social consequences of corporate lay-offs and wage cuts; the steamrolling of small business by big; and welfare cuts have been marshalled by Fox News, G Gordon Liddy and Rush Limbaugh into a powerful force for the right.

This book is Frank's own struggle to get it. Why the good folks of Kansas blame a nebulous 'Liberal elite' and not base profits for their woes. Why they support candidates who say the right things — but perpetually underachieve — on 'moral issues' such as abortion, prayer in schools, gay-marriage and permissive media culture. Why the same candidates always back tax and welfare cuts, the winding back of corporate regulations, cuts to minimum wages, and free trade deals that have wrecked small town Kansas, and no one notices.

Frank's intimacy with Kansas allows him to move beyond sound-grab punditry or easy conclusions. Like Margo Kingston's Hanson supporters in *Off the Rails*, Frank has real sympathy for the foot soldiers and front line organisers in the new Republican putsch. Morality, they tell him, is more important than economics or self-interest and he believes that they believe it. His scorn and ridicule is reserved for far right Republican puppet masters and rudderless Democrats.

Given the emergence of the religious right in Australia's election, the American political context in this book is ominous. It's a political spectrum that ranges from the right, to far right and the extreme right. God, voluntary voting, mass apathy, the free market as God's will and the total invalidation of economic analysis of social decay means that Frank's America is another place entirely. God bless that at least… for as long as it lasts. MARCUS WESTBURY

MUSIC

Warping the Vision

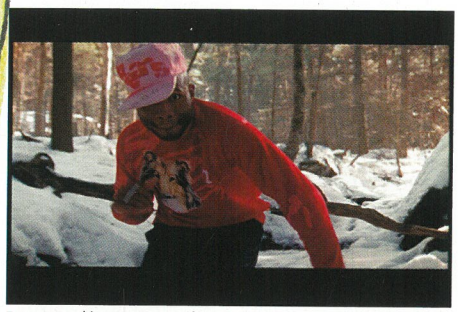
From Aphex Twin's 'Windowlicker'. COURTESY OF INERTIA

For the past 15 years, the brains behind London label Warp Records have worked to subvert the aesthetics and cultural meanings of music video. In the process, they have created some of the most iconic clips of all time. Their new DVD release, Warp Vision, charts their history. Label head Steve Beckett tells DAN RULE all about it.

Music video emerged in the early 80s as the standard technique for promoting pop singles. Elaborate, but often formulaic, video clips were produced for bankable stars with bankable hits. For Warp's Steve Beckett, the conventional teen-oriented clip "just acts as an advert. It's like trying to get [the band] across as almost a brand; trying to make them as visible — and in as many shots — as possible."

Warp's focus has always rested elsewhere. "Music videos should become mini films that stand up in their own right," says Beckett from Warp's London office.

Since being founded in 1989, chart success has never been the label's motivating factor. They have instead concentrated on new, progressive musical and visual styles — almost single-handedly exposing ambient, intelligent electronic music to worldwide audiences in the early 90s. Aside from Nightmares on Wax and staple electronic acts Aphex Twin, Autechre, Squarepusher and Boards of Canada, Warp have released records by experimental hip hop artists like Antipop Consortium and Beans, producers such as Prefuse 73, the retro organ pop of Broadcast, plus the minimal acoustic



From Beans' 'Mutescreamer'.

COURTESY OF INERTIA

compositions of independent New York filmmaker and musician Vincent Gallo.

"We're just trying to be the best an alternative record label can possibly be," says Beckett, "and that means signing the artists we're most excited by. It happens that in the past a lot of those records have come from the electronic scene, because at that time, I believe they were the best music in the world, not just the best in electronic music."

"Music videos should become mini films that stand up in their own right."

Warp's musical emphasis on uniqueness and diversity extends to their visual identity. Having recently finished their first feature film (*Deadman's Shoes* by Shane Meadows), over the last decade and a half they have utilised some of the world's foremost young designers and filmmakers — such as Chris Cunningham, Alex Rutterford and Adam Levite — to create both cover art and music videos. "It's just like anything," poses Beckett, "it's really important to get whatever you're putting out into the world as best as you can possibly make it. So you want the music that you're really passionate about to be complemented with artwork or a clip that's equally as special."

He positions Warp's video productions as valid, contemporary art pieces. "The majority of videos on this release are definitely pieces that can be watched in their own right, rather than something that's just promoting the music. People are actually starting to watch music videos as an art form. There are loads of film festivals now that have music video sections and there are awards for music videos, so I think it's becoming really well represented." The fact that Aphex Twin's 'Windowlicker' clip (directed by Chris Cunningham) — which works to mutate stereotypical ideas of beauty, morphing Aphex Twin's bearded face onto dancing, bikini-clad women — was recently voted one of the most popular music videos of all time in the UK lends some weight to this idea.

The *Warp Vision* release traverses all number of filmic styles from the label's different eras: from Jarvis Cocker's early work behind the lens on Nightmares on Wax's 'Aftermath' and the surreal, dreamlike late 90s work of Jimi Tenor and Sökö Kaukoranta, to the recent, frighteningly structural graphic design-based work of Daniele Lunghini (on Mira Calix's 'Little Numba') and Alex Rutterford (Autechre's 'Gantz Graf').

According to Beckett, one main factor — aside from the creative talents of the directors — has allowed for the cost-effective production of such aesthetically diverse and dynamic material: affordable technology. "You used to have to have a record deal and 50 thousand pounds so you could afford to go to a recording studio, and then this technology came along where people effectively had a recording studio in their bedroom. People could create albums — some of them terrible, some of them amazing — without the filtering process of a major record company deciding whether these people could be creative or not. I think you've got exactly the same thing happening now with film; you've got digital cameras and computing power allowing you to edit films in your bedroom. That's how half of these videos came about."

Aside from that, many of the artists aren't interested in appearing in their own clips, giving the directors more freedom. "Like, Aphex never wanted to turn up to video shoots, so Chris Cunningham had the idea that we'd cast his face, make these masks and put them on little children or women dancing or whatever (laughs). So without him in the clip, we get to use this incredible new idea, and Aphex can just stay home and play Playstation or whatever (laughs). It's brilliant."

The commercial realities of running a label, of course, influence film clip production. "Anything you can use in terms of creativity that's going to make you stick out, you want to do," says Beckett. Coexisting in a marketplace with major labels that spend millions of dollars on advertising alone, labels like Warp rely on quality and distinctiveness to be noticed. "Obviously, the intention is to do both — you need to promote your own music, but you want to be putting something new and creative out into the world as well — something that makes the world a better place in some little way."

DAN RULE IS A WRITER FROM MELBOURNE. HE IS A FOUNDING MEMBER OF INDEPENDENT ART PUBLISHERS THE AND COLLECTIVE.

Warp Vision *is out in Australia through Inertia.*

DIGITAL MEDIA

MEDIA DINOSAURS CLOSE TO EXTINCTION?

Want to watch the latest blockbuster on your laptop? You no longer have to wait until it's released on DVD; peer-to-peer networks allow you to download movies like you used to download songs, and they're changing the way we consume media says SAM DE SILVA.

The Napster system pioneered and popularised song sharing. It didn't discriminate between copyrighted and non-copyrighted material — everything was up for grabs. Millions of songs were swapped and it didn't take long for the record industry to use the courts to shut the Napster operation down in early 2001. But the notion of online sharing had escaped, and second generation applications using peer-to-peer (p2p) networks emerged. Now, with a broadband connection, movies are being swapped just as easily as songs were a couple of years ago.

What is unique about p2p networks is that, unlike Napster, they don't have a centre — sharing occurs between all people connected to the network — so there is no central server to shut down.

Naturally the recording and motion picture industries are doing all they can to stop this uncontrolled form of distribution.

David Weinberger, a commentator on media technologies who was recently invited to a meeting of the World Economic Forum to consult on entertainment and media issues, says corporations are "desperate to find a way in which their organisations still 'add value'."

"The prospect [of widespread copying] has so terrified the recording industry that they are managing to have changes made to the infrastructure, which will make it so hard that only hackers will be able to do it," he says.

Encryption and other technology measures, such as Digital Rights Management Schemes, have the potential to control what can and cannot be copied and played on your computer or even your iPod.

But technology specialist Mark Pesce doesn't believe that the industries will ever be able to contain p2p. "For every action there is an equal, opposite and faster reaction," says Pesce, who has researched the distribution of media in the digital environment for over ten years. He believes that hackers or "the 16 year old next door" will find ways to get around any barriers that the industries are able to put up.

Weinberger doesn't share Pesce's confidence. "There will always be a geek around who, in a back alley, will rewire your computer… But at that point, [the general public has] lost."

"For example, in theory, I can break the security protecting DVDs if I want to make a backup copy for myself, but the actual software is too complex for the likes of me. Further, the penalties for violating these laws are insanely harsh."

The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) is attempting to put fear into the "16 year old next door". In 2004 the association sued over 6,000 file swappers for copyright infringement. They are also pushing for legislation that will hold technology companies responsible for copyright infringements 'induced' by any of their products that do not have effective anti-copy technology.

Weinberger believes that the industry's desire for "absolute control of copyrighted goods" is stifling innovation; that new models of creating and sharing music and videos are struggling to emerge. If industry are to continue to make money from cultural products, he says, they need to appreciate their cultural value.

"It's a mistake, I believe, to think of this stuff as 'content'. That term misses the real value of what we're downloading. It's not content. It's songs, it's music, it's video. We don't consume it, we listen to it, sing it, hum it."

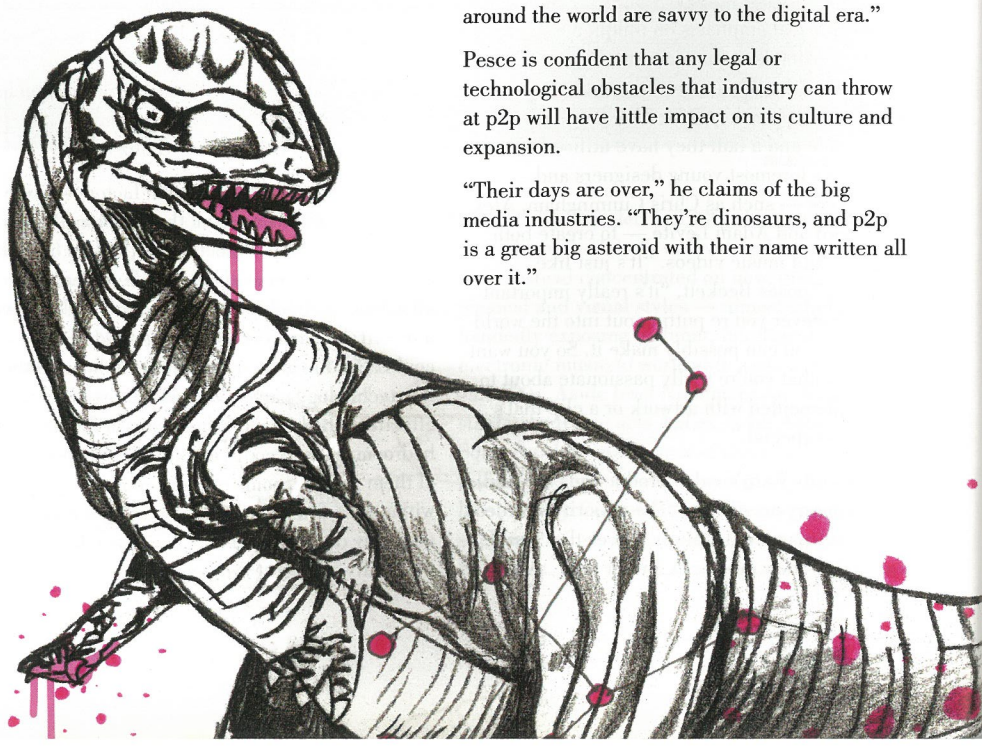
"The recording industry thinks of it as content because they actually don't understand the value of what they are distributing. If they did, they would be in a better position to figure out how to turn worldwide file sharing into a source of revenue," suggests Weinberger.

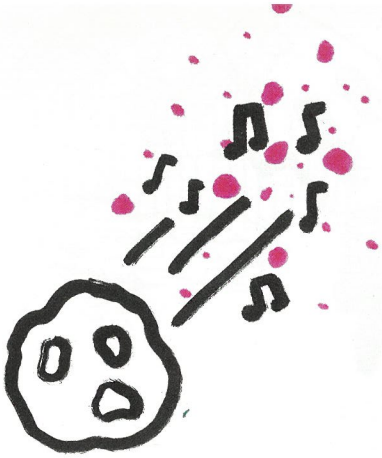
Pesce has recently been recruited by the Australian Film, Television and Radio School to integrate digital media practices across the curriculum. Whenever he is given the opportunity, he talks about the death of broadcast and the virtues of p2p networks. But not everyone is hearing his message.

"I'm pretty sure that the older, established Australian producers just don't get it," he says. "The Australian film market grows ever smaller and less significant, and these producers stand less of a chance of making a successful movie than ever before — because other producers around the world are savvy to the digital era."

Pesce is confident that any legal or technological obstacles that industry can throw at p2p will have little impact on its culture and expansion.

"Their days are over," he claims of the big media industries. "They're dinosaurs, and p2p is a great big asteroid with their name written all over it."





VIRTUAL CAPITAL

The tiny island of Norrath, once a mystical and untouched landscape, is "now a capitalist amusement park" says economist Edward Castronova. Norrath's roller coaster ride from unknown utopia to the 77th richest country in the world is typical of many an island paradise: tourists and corporations initiate a buying spree that brings about a race to the bottom; sickening crime, poverty, and addiction follow. All this is true — except that Norrath doesn't exist. It's the polygon capital of virtual world EverQuest, where half a million gamers take on medieval personas and enter a virtual world to rival our real one.

Chances are if you're not a gamer you have probably never heard of EverQuest. In 1999 producers Sony 'virtually floated' the island, leaving players with *Lord of the Flies* freedoms. But how did the players create and almost destroy paradise? To understand that we must look at EverQuest history, says Castronova, who has made a career out of researching the game and its unique economy.

Justine from Australian gamer collective Cold Fury explains the evolution of Everquest: "Everyone started poor and penniless, as hunter and gatherer type characters." As people started gathering wealth it became a race to the top, but still "the only way to become powerful characters and earn money was to put time into the game," she explains.

Then the Berlin Wall tumbled, says Castronova. Pre-levelled or powered up characters, digital swords, and magic potions began to fetch thousands on eBay. One single EverQuest platinum was worth three US cents, characters regularly sold for $10,000 and players were earning around $3.50 per hour — making EverQuest richer per capita than India and China. What happened next tells us a great deal about human and economic behaviour claims Castronova.

As EverQuest collided with the real world, "wealthy Wall Street geeks and rich suburban kids introduced mass inequality," he says. New players lacking virtual goods met stiff class divisions. Not surprisingly, crime surfaced. Teenagers stole real money for virtual goods.

The after-effects — suicide, marriage breakdown, and "Evercrack" game addiction — are as familiar as they are ironic says Castronova. Australian gamer Jenny says she was "ready to take the kids and walk out on my husband who was, literally, spending days in the game." It wasn't long before the 'EverQuest widows club', 'EverQuest psychiatry' and 'Evercrack detox' were also doing a brisk trade.

But equality is slowing returning to the badlands of Norrath. Thousands of rich players are wandering around quite lonely. Those buying their way into the game haven't learnt any EverQuest skills, "so they can't fight let alone build a society," say Cold Fury. Simply cheating and faking it leads to ostracism. No wonder the material rich are unhappy in the real world concludes Castronova.
NICHOLAS MONTGOMERY

FROM PAIN TO PLEASURE AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN

Modell 5 PHOTO: LYN POOL

SenseSurround is an exhibition at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) in Melbourne that immerses its audience in multi-sensory environments. Through combinations of light and sound, it explores new modes of interaction and experience.

One of the works featured, *Modell 5*, by UK/Austrian artists Granular Synthesis, is an intense audiovisual event contained in a room that vibrates due to its immensely powerful sonic frequencies. The audience members are given earplugs before entering the space, and are advised to use them. There is, in fact, a health warning at the entrance — so don't go any further if you are prone to heart palpitations or nervous conditions! The four projection screens display a woman's head, in various degrees of abstraction, through video loops and stutters. Described by the artists as a "choir of cyborgs", these heads create a cacophony of human sounds, the facial expressions ambiguously switching (or twitching) from what looks like extreme pain, to extreme pleasure, and everything else in between. At times they are reminiscent of the primal, apocalyptic gestures of Japanese Butoh dancers. Is the woman/cyborg having a psychotic seizure, in the midst of an extended orgasm, or is she being tortured? *Modell 5* effectively blurs these lines, leaving a lasting impression of emotional and psychological unrest. The 'performance' runs for about 45 minutes and is both highly unsettling and meditative in its combination of repetitive, rhythmic elements.
ADELE WILKES

Modell 5 *is part of the* Melbourne International Arts Festival. SenseSurround *is showing until 7 November, 2004.*

FILM

Strange Child: an Interview with Director Guy Maddin

Maria de Medeiros in *The Saddest Music in the World*

I discovered the work of idiosyncratic Canadian filmmaker Guy Maddin at the 2004 *Melbourne International Film Festival*. Artistic and original, Maddin's films are a mix of silent-era aesthetics and technicolour romanticism. Combining a morbid fascination, absurd humour, and lustrous images, Maddin's vision is the perfect antidote to our conservative times. His latest film, *The Saddest Music in the World*, features Isabella Rossellini as a legless beer baroness in a snow-covered, depression-era Winnipeg, Canada. As a marketing ploy, she stages a global competition to find the nation with the most melancholic music, stating, "If you're sad, and like beer, I'm your lady". Hilarious delirium ensues. As yet there is no release date set for Australian cinemas, so you'll need to petition your local arthouse cinemas, or get the DVD imported. It is thoroughly worth the effort!

What draws you to older styles/aesthetics of filmmaking? Where does your love of antiquity come from?

I've always tried to figure out where I really am in the great flow of time. I realised somehow as early as my preschool days that we weren't just all surfing the foremost crest of a time wave, but were really in the middle of a vast ocean current. As soon as I could read I read obituaries, looking carefully at the birth dates of the oldest and youngest of all these dead strangers, and comparing them to the necrology of famous people listed in the one book we had in our house, a big tattered almanac that seemed to contain all the knowledge in the universe, but which in fact was merely crammed with statistical tables. I became obsessed with human timelines, and tried to make sense of my own, as yet, open-ended one.

My Aunt Lil, who lived downstairs, had a big book of old photos, some of the subjects were historical figures captured in the earliest days of daguerreotypes, others were simply snaps of my family taken before I was born — pictures of my creaky old parents and my older siblings captured in the full blush of their vital youth, doe-faced and loaded with potential! All solutions to my inchoate inquiries seemed to lie in these photographs, in photography itself. I've never been able to stop searching for answers in these silver nitrate tea leaves. An old photo is still an open grave to me. In the face of such fixed compositions, sometimes I get a panicky claustrophobia, other times I can't wait to dive into the hole and get comfy.

What do you base the humour in your films on, and what are some things that make you laugh aloud or giggle like a child?

Perhaps because I was such a strange child, I've really had to work hard at being socially liquid. I make frequent mistakes in public — humiliating ones! Everyone makes the little gaffes, but mine have taken on melodramatic hyperbolic proportions. Including them in my own films is a desperate act, a plea for the audience to recognise themselves in these abasements, dismiss the embarrassments with a chuckle and embrace me as one of their polished own. As a result, I really like the laxative scene in *Dumb and Dumber*, and the cuckolding of son by father in *Damaged*, stuff like that.

Do you have any recurring dreams or nightmares?

Lately most of my dreams are about the house I grew up in. How I love that curious place: a beauty salon storefront with vast labyrinthine living quarters above, behind and below. It was sold out of the family two decades ago but I'm allowed to wander its hallways every night in my sleep. What sweet peregrinations! I drive by the old place almost every day on the way to work, or on a visit to my mother's senior home. Wherever I'm going I seem to be drawn out of the way to pass by this reliquary of my longing heart — I have to assure myself it hasn't been torn down. One day I will drive by just in time to see the wrecker's ball tearing through my old bedroom, through all the layers of wallpaper I had in each and every era of redecoration, each

year of my history laid bare like the rings of a tree. This will be my punishment for watching other house demolitions with such pleasure. Perhaps this is what human funerals should be like. Instead of being interred, the dead should be placed in a big boloney-slicer and those attending the memorial can pay tribute to each thinly peeled back piece of the loved one's person, finally getting to know the honoured from the inside out, layer by layer.

Do you have a particular set of collaborators you always work with?

I have some favourite people I've met around Winnipeg over the years. Some of my original collaborators have sadly moved away, or jumped off buildings, leaving me to find new colleagues. But I really like the community in Winnipeg. Most of my inner circle has trouble finding work in the film business, or any business for that matter. Some of them I'm not allowed to hire on my bigger projects, because they're too quirky and are always getting fired. My dear friend Michael Powell got fired from *Dracula* after I hired him to make a giant crucified Christ and he spent the first two weeks of pre-production working on His oversized, papier-mache penis. Michael was falling behind schedule, as he always does, and all he had was this penis, and no explanation why he couldn't get past it to the rest of His body. I trusted him to finish on time but the producer didn't and replaced him. That was the last time I worked with him. But there's always the next picture.

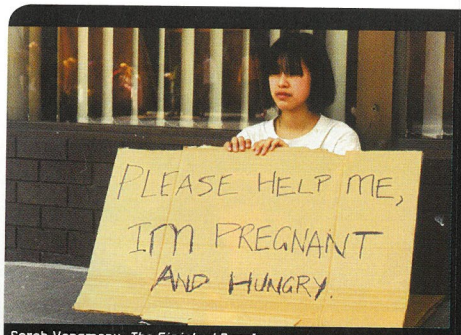
What was it like growing up surrounded by a "Scandinavian gynocracy of brooding women"?

Everyone was as gloomy as a Norse night around the house. Monochrome emotional colours. I like it that way. In life and in film.

What era would you like to be living in right now?

I like now. The terror of the uncertainty, political and personal, is timeless. We're in the middle of history, maybe a cool part. Endtimes, maybe.
ADELE WILKES

DVD Review
The Finished People
Madman Entertainment



Sarah Vongmany, *The Finished People*

Set in Sydney's south west, *The Finished People* takes its title from a comment by a 19 year old street-kid: "People think we're... capable of nothing. They think we're finished people." SCOTT BROOK reviews.

The Finished People isn't a documentary, yet there are moments when its documentary style jolts the viewer into feeling the stories are too authentic for the label 'fiction'. This is partly due to the use of a hand-held digital camera, natural lighting and confessional voice-overs, but it also testifies to the uncanny intelligence of the performances.

The film is a street-level drama about youth homelessness and heroin addiction, but its effect is far subtler than such commonly referenced 'issues' might imply. The director, Khoa Do, met the principal actors while taking film-making workshops at Open Family in Cabramatta, a youth welfare organisation where he'd once volunteered.

A runaway-success that found its way into the Montreal Film Festival, scored 4½ stars from *The Movie Show*, and had reviewers referencing Italian neo-realism, Dogma and cinéma-vérité, *The Finished People* was made with the help of numerous friends, family, interested locals, and a social worker who was up for some acting.

The film centres on the lives of three young male characters. Van (Joe Le) sleeps in a rooftop carpark above a market and befriends Carla (Daniela Italiano) after stealing a shirt from her clothesline. Des (Rodney Anderson) gets involved with a local crime boss so he and his pregnant girlfriend, Sophie (Sarah Vongmany), can get off the streets. Tommy (Jason McGoldrick), a heroin user since the age of 13, is trying to get straight and get a job. With the help of old school mate Sara (Mylinh Dinh), Tommy goes for job interviews in which the wary employers ask how he spends his time in Cabramatta.

More banal than 'gritty' in its social realism, the film suspends moments of dramatic confrontation with the undramatic, everyday-ness of social disadvantage. The three main characters' lives never intersect, but through the careful interlacing of each story with scenes of Cabramatta's street-life, the film documents the ambient exchange between people and place in a way that implies the director's real concern is with a specific milieu, rather than character or plot.

Although *The Finished People* has been praised for its socially-engaged vision at a time when Australian cinema appears to have abandoned such territory, this film does come after a decade of local films concerned with social disenfranchisement for which the suburbs, or a particular suburb, are central. Just think *Mallboy*, *The Boys* or *Idiot Box*. In saying this, I am aware that Cabramatta is one of the most media-demonised suburbs in Australia, and don't want to obscure the film's broader relevance.

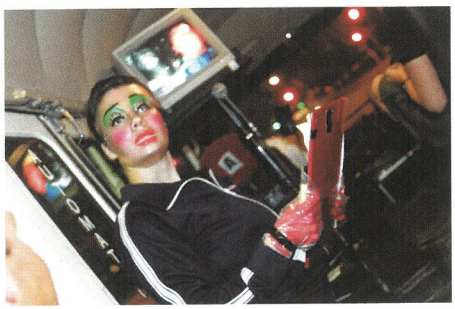
For its cinema release, the film's epigraph described Cabramatta as "the drug and crime capital of Australia" (attributed to a Federal MP). This was replaced for the DVD with a certain notorious promise about no child living in poverty by 1990. In an interview with *Underdog Online* the director revealed that the film crew was once harassed by locals who thought they were from *A Current Affair*.

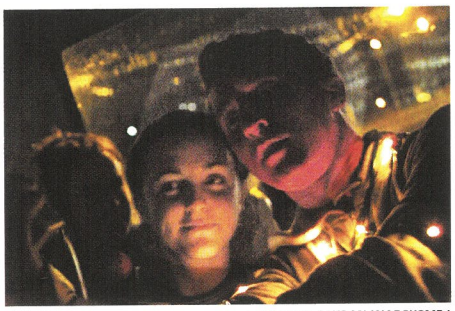
The reliance on a collaborative and semi-improvised script does produce moments where the film's authenticity slips and plausibility is stretched, but it is precisely here that we see the film's other strength: it is social drama conceived by those with the greatest stake in the issues it presents.

The Finished People *was nominated for three AFI awards, including Best Direction.*

VISUAL ART

Site Seeing





PHOTOS: BOHDAN WARCHOMIJ

Perth-based new media arts collective, pvi began researching their project, *tts (formerly terrorist training school)* in 2001. LUCAS IHLEIN met with pvi's kelli mccluskey, steve bull, and chris williams to talk about the forthcoming *tts:australia* national tour.

tts, is not — of course —a *real* training school for terrorists. It's a rambling, chaotic performance event on a 22-seater bus. The bus tour parodies those banal site-seeing trips, compulsory for tourists the world over. pvi's punters pay the fare and pile in, placing themselves at the mercy of multiple-personality tour guides, as they are led on a goose-chase of key "terrorist hotspots" around the city.

The first version of this work, *terrorist training school: route 65* was planned for Perth in September 2002. However, a week before launching as part of Perth's *Artrage Festival*, the Sari Club was bombed in Bali, prompting a torrent of complaint from West Aussies offended by the pvi's "insensitive" treatment of this real act of terror. Such was the ruckus that the state's arts minister herself stepped in, "requesting" that *Artrage* "strongly consider" postponing or removing the work from its program.

The event was postponed to November 2002, and its name softened to the acronym *tts*. It's a euphemism that breaks down the moment anyone asks the inevitable question: "But what does *tts* stand for?"

One of the key issues, says kelli, is funding: "We received generous government arts funding to research the sites for the bus tour, and to investigate the technologies of security and surveillance, which have proliferated in Australia during the last three or so years." But funding, as the creators of Australia Council funded *Escape From Woomera* discovered, brings its own problems. steve acknowledges, "[Terrorism] is difficult territory. But that's no reason not to want to attempt to confront or deal with it somehow. And I think that's what funding panels are encouraging us to do. But they're forced onto the defensive whenever a controversial project it has funded comes under attack from tabloid media." Perhaps in reaction to the controversy, the Brisbane Powerhouse claimed it was unable to provide support for the Brisbane leg of the tour, which has been dropped as a result.

pvi's research expeditions took them to every parliament house in the country, observing security systems. chris explains: "The one in Melbourne had these full-on free-standing doorway scanning devices to walk through, like the ones in airports. They'd just installed them and they were very proud of them. We asked a bunch of questions: 'how do they work, how were they installed, had they upped the staff, do they patrol often, where do they go when they patrol?' Before you know it, they had disclosed a whole lot of sensitive information."

In Adelaide, pvi were able to access the top of the city's tallest building, posing as British tourists. kelli says, "It was the perfect kind of disguise. You're so expected to be laden with camcorders, recording devices and cameras as a tourist. We were able to film everything without suspicions being raised."

The connection between tourism and terrorism is no coincidence. Everywhere pvi travelled on their reconnaissance trip, the people they interviewed observed that tourist sites were the most likely terrorist targets. Many of these sites were, of course, the icons that are a source of our 'national pride'. These sites, and some more secret places off the beaten track, will become stops on the big bus tour for *tts: australia*.

In their forthcoming 'national tour' pvi will work with local artists and performers who will contribute events and installations along the route. In order to build their network of collaborators, the group has produced *tts:recruit*, an interactive DVD in the style of a terrorist-cell induction video. Much of the material for the DVD came from a harrowing research trip that a couple of pvi's team made, posing as military recruits on an Army Reserve weekend in the West Australian desert. The DVD is compered by stocking-faced, chanting, gung-ho meathead types. pvi has sent the DVD off for Film and Literature classification, and hope to place it in video rental stores around the country.

As for the inevitable early morning phone calls from tabloid media, pvi has a strategy for that too. "We're passionate about this work and will stand by it," says steve. pvi is planning a targeted media campaign that appeals to audiences, while attempting to stay under the radar from word-twisting journalists. "This is a complex work, which neither promotes nor belittles terrorism," steve says "and to have it simplified and caricatured just so that the *Daily Telegraph* can sell a few more copies is not something we're going to lose sleep over."

THIS INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED BY LUCAS IHLEIN, KEG ROLL AND JIM SINGLINE, CO-FOUNDERS OF THE NETWORK OF UNCOLLECTABLE ARTISTS (NUCA).

tts: australia will take place between February and May 2005 in Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney. Artists who want to become tts recruits can contact pvi through their website, http://www.pvicollective.com

Night Vision

Jenny Fraser, *Full Moon at Cedar Bay* 1998

Brisbane-based artist Jenny Fraser grew up in the tropics and says, "Twilight is my favourite part of the day; I look forward to the cool and find myself relaxed and more productive." Fraser is the curator of the exhibition *Out of the Dark* — a body of work that takes as its subject, nightfall and beyond. It's a collection that subtly reflects on, and rejects, "people's fear of the dark".

Instead, *Out of the Dark* explores a range of Indigenous associations with night, "A promise of tomorrow, meaningful conversation over firelight, party-time, moonlight swims, a dance, a chant, navigation, respite from the heat and inspiration."

Out of the Dark mixes mediums — 35mm and digital photography, performance, video and video still capture — and feel. Images range from the seedy and garish *White Hot Dancers* (Melbourne's White Hot Collective) to Jason Davidson's spectacularly cracked sky in *Kalkaringi Lightning 2000*. Ceremony, spook and sleaze all figure in this seductive assemblage. One of four participating Brisbane-based artists, Richard Bell is among the most (in)famous inclusions — *Out of the Dark* is Bell's first foray into photography since his 1992 *Pigeonholed* series.

Fraser has herself had "a thing for night shots" since the late 1990s. "I spent a lot of time capturing the night around Yidinji Country (Cairns) and Kuku Yalanji Country (Bloomfield and Cooktown) through labour intensive 35mm camera set ups." She documented "landscapes, seascapes, cityscapes and isolated dwellings like the 1875 Lions Den Hotel". Fraser's 1998 *Full Moon at Cedar Bay* required "experimentation with long exposure times, and there wasn't much room for error! Mangkal Mankalba (Cedar Bay) is a place that you can only visit by boat or a long walk over a steep track." EVE VINCENT

Out of the Dark *showed at Brisbane's wiseART Gallery and has a permanent home online at* http://www.fineartforum.org/Gallery/cybertribe/dark

Breathtaking Work

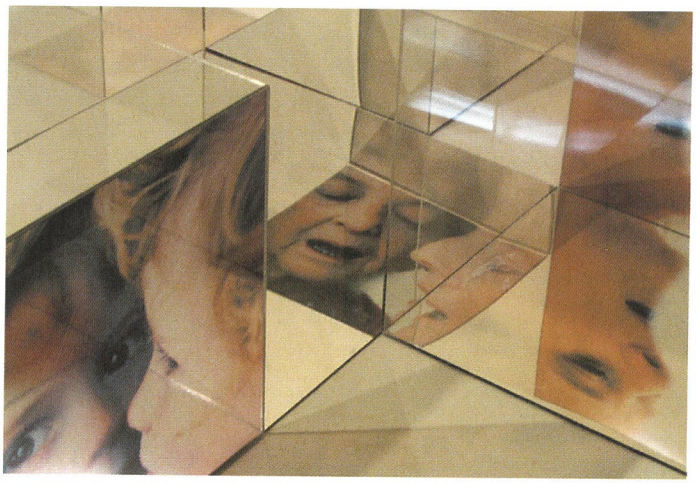


PHOTO: TARA GILBEE

In late October artist Tara Gilbee travelled to the Centre D'Art Marnay Art Centre (CAMAC) in France to develop her interdisciplinary installations. Before leaving, Tara spoke to ZSUZSI SOBOSLAY about her recently exhibited *Velvet Light* and *Breathing Down Your Neck* series.

"For *Breathing Down Your Neck* I videoed people breathing on perspex, and basically breathing onto each other in pairs. It's made more complex by the mirrors on either side. My main aim was to explore the boundaries associated around our body, whether people would put themself in this uncomfortable space and whether they would stand afar or near. I found that most people broke the uncomfortable space with humour.

"In the *Velvet Light* series the images are of people breathing on a mirror. The images show people as fragments of reference: their profiles say one thing about them, their relationship to their reflection another. They can also appear as if breathing themselves into life. In the installation they shimmer and change: light bounces through clear perspex and reflects onto the walls like slides. It becomes difficult to know who is the subject and who is the object as you move around and through the work.

"For the original concept, I was struck by the sensation of focussing on the breath in meditation — the idea that the space between the in and out-breath is the space of potential or void, a space that is indicative of death, and that each new breath is a new beginning.

"These pieces could be about the experience of how we might come together, crossing thresholds into the sometimes painful place of meeting, cooperating, sharing." ZSUZSI SOBOSLAY

Velvet Light *showed at Linden, St Kilda Centre for Contemporary Art,*
http://www.lindenarts.org/show_040819/gallery3.html
http://www.camac.org

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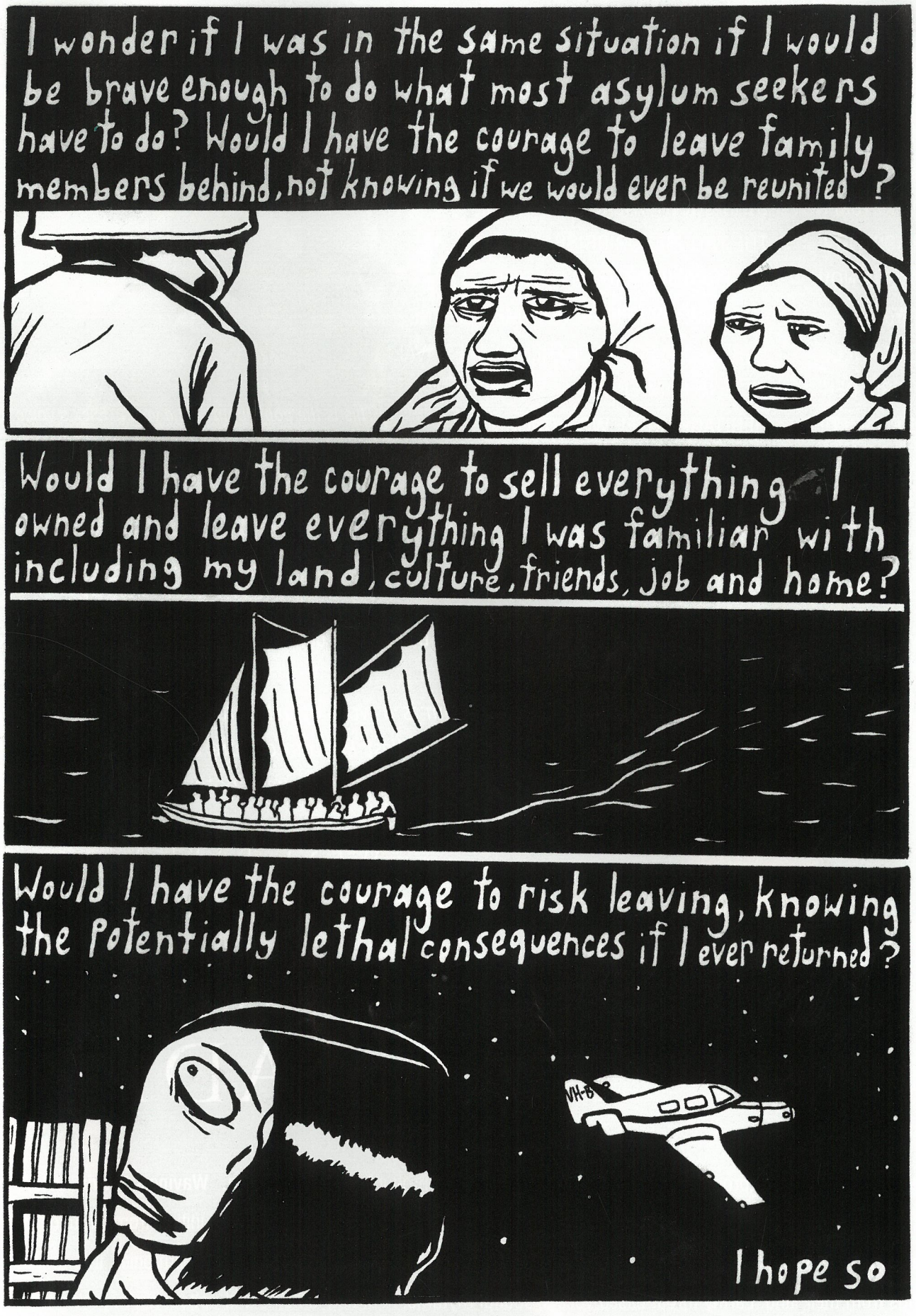
Flight Path

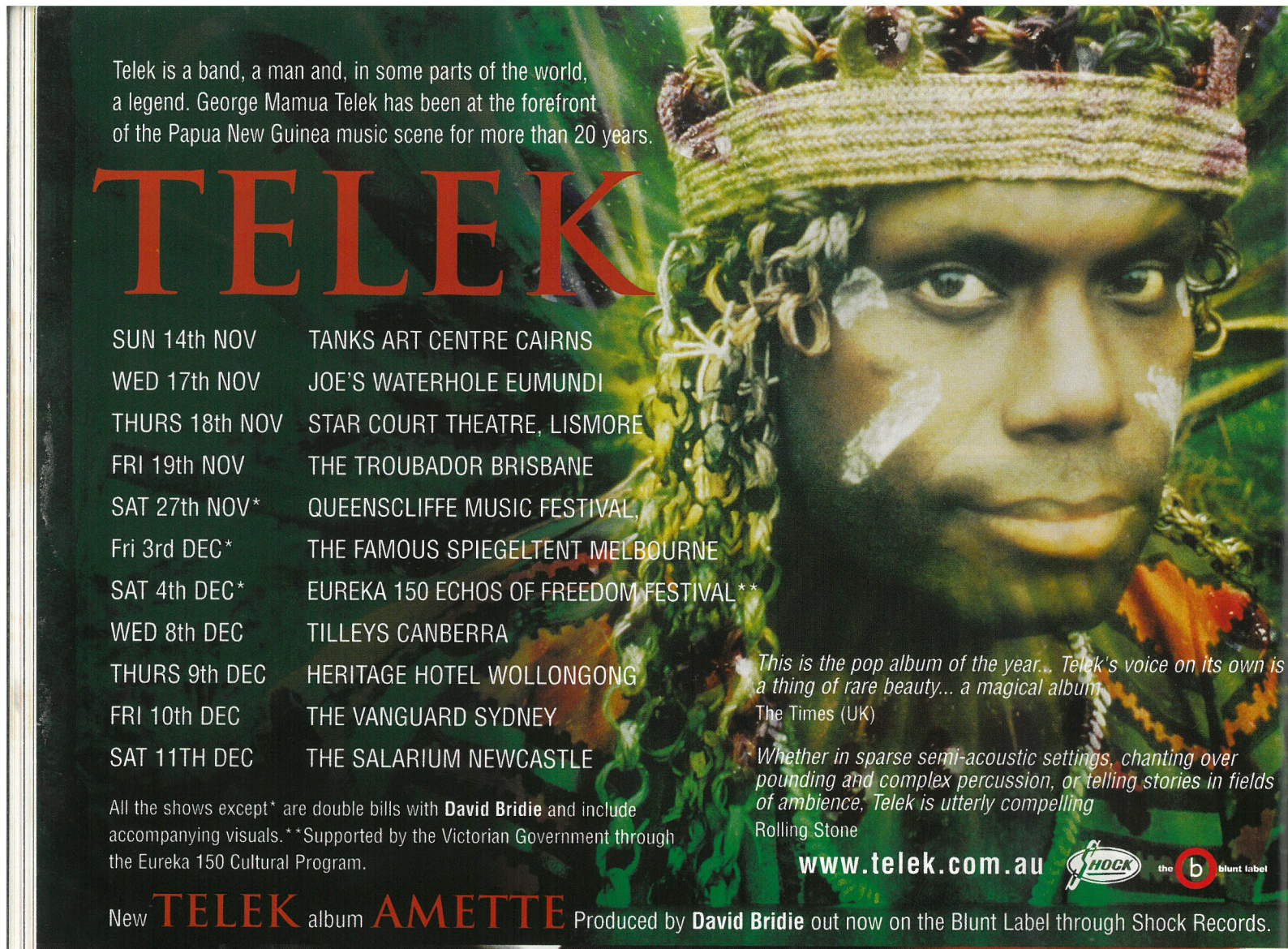
MANDY ORD

When I started doing voluntary work at the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre I came to realise that flight paths exist in so many of the lives of the people I see around me.

People, who having fled persecution in their own countries, travel the dangerous and invisible path towards a freedom that so many of us may take for granted as a basic human right.


I wonder if I was in the same situation if I would be brave enough to do what most asylum seekers have to do? Would I have the courage to leave family members behind, not knowing if we would ever be reunited?
Would I have the courage to sell everything I owned and leave everything I was familiar with including my land, culture, friends, job and home?
Would I have the courage to risk leaving, knowing the potentially lethal consequences if I ever returned?
I hope so

ASYLUM SEEKER RESOURCE CENTRE: http://www.asrc.org.au MANDY ORD IS A MELBOURNE-BASED COMIC ARTIST.



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SAT 27th NOV*	QUEENSCLIFFE MUSIC FESTIVAL,
Fri 3rd DEC*	THE FAMOUS SPIEGELTENT MELBOURNE
SAT 4th DEC*	EUREKA 150 ECHOS OF FREEDOM FESTIVAL**
WED 8th DEC	TILLEYS CANBERRA
THURS 9th DEC	HERITAGE HOTEL WOLLONGONG
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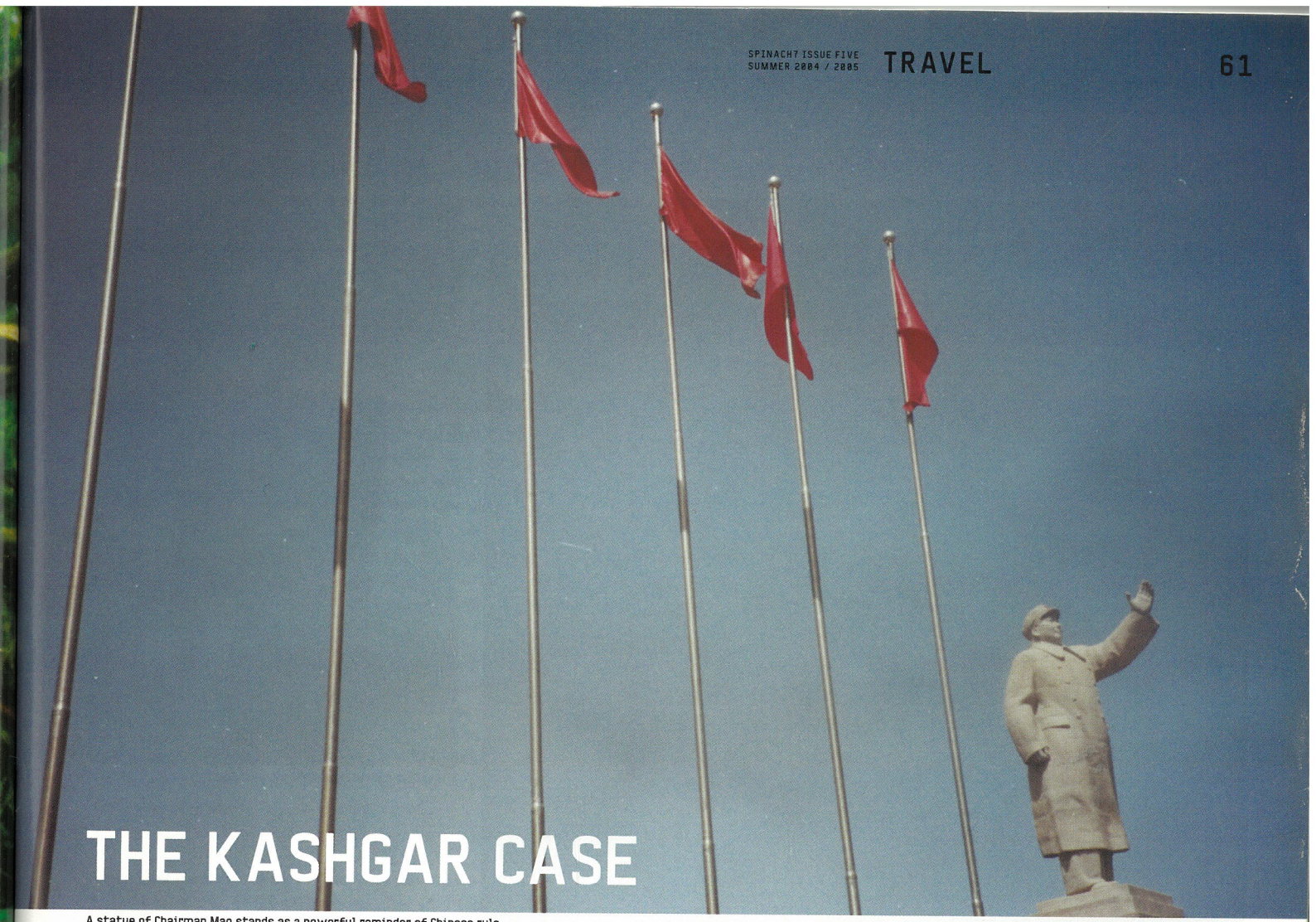


THE KASHGAR CASE

A statue of Chairman Mao stands as a powerful reminder of Chinese rule

MARK MORDUE ventures to far-western China to find that the legendary town of Kashgar — the bustling meeting point of four different routes on the Old Silk Road — is being consumed by Chinese development. Photos by JANE CAUGHT.

At the Byron Bay Writers Festival I was invited to speak on a travel panel called 'Evocative Images from Around the World'. We were asked to describe how we translated exotic images into stories, and what this meant for both the writer and the reader. Did something substantial occur, or was it just armchair travelling?

By dint of that latter observation, I felt were we also being asked something much less flattering: whether travel writing was doing as much to remove us from the world as a disengaged news report, rather than bringing us closer together. And if that were true, whether it had become another form of careless western consumption. This idea depressed me.

Despite having written a book that was full of global travel stories from which I was supposed to draw anecdotes and wisdoms, whatever I started to write down for my speech felt fake and forced. By the day of the panel I still had nothing prepared. The impulse to wing it was fast disintegrating into something more despairing: a travel writer with nothing to report from the world at all.

★

That uneasy morning I found myself looking at a slim, small briefcase my partner and I had recently bought in the bustling town of Kashgar in Xinjiang in far western China. The briefcase was a souvenir from our travels, nothing more.

And yet the longer I looked at it the more I thought about that particular trip and what it meant for me now. How, like every other city in China, Kashgar was being refashioned in the generic style rabidly popular across the nation: with vistas of obliterating grey concrete roads and endless cheap apartment blocks shrouded in a brownish atmosphere of decay.

The old and legendary Kashgar, a place of ornately decorated wood and creaking donkey carts, medieval secrets-and-shadows and hard clay homes, seemed to be shrinking by the moment in the face of such changes. Soon, I felt, the exotic turning point of hundreds of years worth of travel diaries from Marco Polo on would no longer exist. With that loss went, of course, a people and their history: the Uighurs of Central Asia.

Aware of this imminent erasure, we ventured into the old quarter of Kashgar where Uighur architecture and customs still predominate despite the relentless Chinese fondness for 'development', a part of which involves a long-running program of Han population re-settlement into the area.

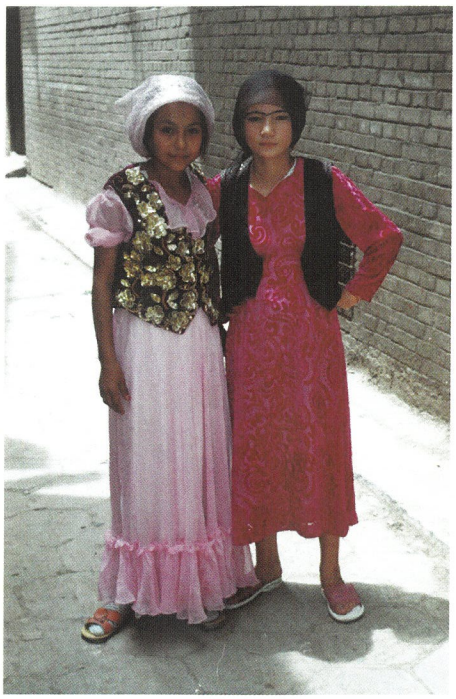
Our grieving felt premature, however, as we stood there watching hundreds of heavily moustached men playing pool on badly torn felt, their lopsided tables lined up like racing cars on the grid at Le Mans; starting right out front of the Id Kah mosque and surging on into the middle of the Friday night markets. I was surprised by this brazen rub of entertainment, commerce and worship, though no one else seemed to mind a bit, least of all the men, smoking and shouting and cheering around the clacking tables.

Nearby a wall of ghetto blasters roared an artless *musique concrete* at full ranting-and-wailing volume from an area set aside for selling electrical goods.

An ice cream stall had a small television wired to a loudhailer system that was belting out the soundtrack to an Indian action movie — attracting another solid crowd of a hundred or so people, sighing and groaning to the action at hand.

The life force here was certainly intimidating in its vitality and heckling energy — I could see how it might worry an occupying power. Even in such impoverished circumstances, these were not a people to take lightly. They exuded energy like an electrical charge.

Reading in the streets



Young Uighur girls in traditional dress and make up

There were Uighurs selling clothes, wooden bowls, lamb on skewers, ornately decorated rocking cribs for babies, more lamb on skewers, knives so sharp they shaved the hair off your arms in one clean stroke (look! See!), all manner of shoes, proud hats, sad fruit, even more lamb on skewers, lamb stew, lamb with lamb, tasty flat bread with bits of stone from the walls of wood-fire ovens stuck to the base (easily picked off with those sharp knives or simply crunched on with a bitter jolt), and a variety of animal skins including that of a large wild wolf.

★

It was that faint time between twilight and night itself. At first we could barely see them as they sat, crouched over and poor looking, on the periphery of the main square while the market thronged wildly away from them: a Uighur man and his family, with a few belongings scattered in the dirt. It was the pencil-sketched faintness of their presence that actually attracted my eye, the fact that they hardly seemed to exist at all.

As I looked closer it seemed to me they had raided what little of their lives might be of value: a maroon brown briefcase covered in dust; a badly dented soup ladle; the snapped pedal from a bicycle; some other bits of metal and wire that were like things, curiosities, you might see lying by the roadside if your eyesight was good and you were traveling on foot. I was amazed they were even trying to sell these scraps.

The look of the family in the encroaching darkness, their meagre offerings, tugged at our hearts. So we asked how much for the briefcase and the soup ladle. The father looked up and held all the fingers in his hand out towards me. Five yuan was equal to one American dollar. It was like asking for nothing.

It's normal in markets like these to bargain hard, but we gave them the five yuan without argument and left, while other traders in the square laughed at me, pointing at the absurdity of a westerner walking around with an old soup ladle in his hand.

We had hoped the man and his family might ask for ten or even twenty yuan. We didn't need the soup ladle, and the briefcase didn't look like it was fit for any document I would value. We just wanted to give them something, and this was a way to do it with dignity left intact: the age-old process of barter-and-exchange at a market on the Old Silk Road. Much as I wanted to hand over more money once the deal was done, I knew it was not the right thing to do. That our soup ladle and briefcase and the five yuan now in his hand were the best things that could happen for everyone that strangely pulsing evening.

★

The condition of this family summed up, for me, everything happening in Xinjiang while I was there: how poor and oppressed Uighur people are under Chinese rule; the ragged, brutalised flavour to their lives.

Famous for their fighting spirit and their flamboyant, emerald-studded knives, the Uighurs are surrounded by wild, stunning mountains along their west and south-west borders with the former Soviet republics of Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, as well as Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Tibet; while the Taklimakan Desert (which translates roughly as "you go in but you won't come out") to the east further serves to isolate the region from the rest of China. Despite these natural barriers and their own unruly spirit, the Uighurs have seen their striking countryside invaded and reinvaded for centuries.

At first it was the Arabs, Mongols and Chinese who flooded back and forth on missions of conquest and trade. Then the region became part of the push and pull of Russian and British influences in that imperial chess match of nineteenth century geo-politics known as 'The Great Game'.

Chinese and Soviet forces continued to vie for dominance in the area, the latter triumphing in support of a brief Islamic regime called the Eastern Turkestan Republic that began in 1944 and fell in 1950. Since then the Chinese have ruled with an increasing iron fist, renaming the territory the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. Beyond concerns for regional security and the long-running imperial claims that it has always been a part of greater China, the fact that Xinjiang is fabulously rich in oil and tin makes it an even more desirable asset for the Chinese.

Given its physical extremities and extreme isolation, Xinjiang remains a volatile zone, prone to internal instability and disruptive external influences. The Uighurs have looked on enviously at the breakaway Soviet states across the border, and Islamic extremism continues to filter through as an influence despite the essentially moderate faith of most Uighurs. Small bomb explosions from Kashgar to Beijing have gone off in the name of various terrorist/independence groups, while most Chinese associate displaced Uighurs across the country with a culture of crime that ranges from black market money exchanges to drug smuggling — a not entirely unreasonable stereotype.

Since September 11, 2001 the Uighurs in Xinjiang have been more shat upon than ever before by the communist government. The west's panic to maintain the 'war on terror' has given the Chinese licence to do as they please in remote regions like Xinjiang — and to make sure that the independence dreams of Islamic Uighurs stay ground into the dirt. As the Chinese propaganda against 'Uighur splittists' so neatly puts it: "they shall be beaten down as a rat crosses a road".

★

Once I got back to Sydney I cleaned up the briefcase and polished it and found it wasn't in such bad condition after all. I imagined it might have served as their child's school satchel. Along with everything else about my memories of that day, this lone speculation made me feel intensely sad for this thing now in my hands, for all the miles it had travelled and who might have carried it before me, dreaming of better days.

And yet when I first came to the Byron Bay Writers Festival, I had brought the case along for no major reason other than the fact that I thought it made me look good. I liked the fit of it under my arm as a fashion item. It was cool.

Only when I began to think about what I would say for this literary panel that had so troubled me, how I would deal with the phrase 'evocative images from around the world' and the moral dilemmas it provoked, did I really look at the case again and decide that it was worth dusting off, opening up.

The theme 'evocative images from around the world' invited the idea that travel writers really are just walking, talking postcards, delivering the world, pleasantly, to our readers' doors. There is nothing wrong with that, I guess. But I'd like to think it is possible to do more and I said so on the day in much the same way as I am saying so now. I said that it's possible to bring back images and feelings that contain some humane and deeper relationship to a place or a people, no matter how fleeting the connections might seem. As one might unclip an old, beaten briefcase to reach inside and see, suddenly, despite its emptiness, another kind of story, travelling silently in your company, waiting to be opened and finally heard.

MARK MORDUE IS AUTHOR OF THE TRAVEL COLLECTION *DASTGAH: DIARY OF A HEADTRIP* (ALLEN & UNWIN). HE WAS THE 2001 ASIALINK WRITER IN RESIDENCE AT BEIJING UNIVERSITY.

The Kashgar Market, once a pivotal point on the Old Silk Road

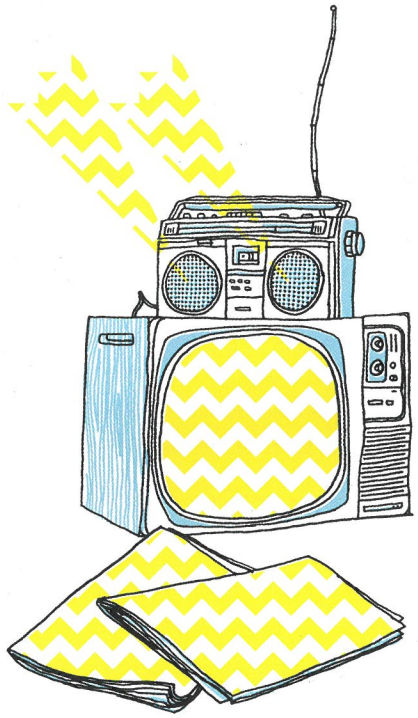


ILLUSTRATION: LACHLAN CONN

Australia has the most concentrated media ownership in the Western world. Yet as the Howard Government enters into its fourth term — this time with a friendly Senate — further media ownership deregulation is back on the agenda. *SPINACH7* asked Dr Derek Wilding, director of the Communication Law Centre in Sydney how things are likely to change.

At this point we don't know whether there'll be a new bill or whether the government will resurrect the 2002 Media Ownership Bill. That bill aimed to remove the rules relating to foreign ownership altogether. It also effectively removed the cross-media rules. Under the current rules, companies cannot own both a major newspaper and a television station in the one market (or a radio station in combination with a newspaper or a TV station). It's these rules that stop Kerry Packer buying Fairfax while he still owns Channel Nine. Under the Media Ownership Bill, Packer would be able to buy into Fairfax and Rupert Murdoch would be able to buy into television (adding to News Corp's holdings in print and pay TV).

The whole plan fell apart when Labor, the minor parties and the independents came in behind Brian Harradine's alternative scheme. They were prepared to remove the foreign ownership rules and modify the cross-media rules by removing the provisions relating to radio and permitting some media mergers in regional areas. But the 'line in the sand' drawn by Senator Harradine was this: there could be no mergers between the major newspapers and television stations in the five mainland capitals. The Harradine scheme saw the newsrooms of these organisations as being the most influential in establishing the national news agenda in Australia. Since the government was not prepared to accept this compromise, the Bill was defeated. Prior to the election it was rejected twice by the Senate.

A range of interest groups have pushed for the changes: what influence have proprietors' lobby groups had?

The media companies have been very influential. There is no question that they are expert lobbyists and the Bill was noteable for its attempt to satisfy all the players — in removing both foreign ownership and cross-media ownership rules, it satisfied just about everyone. Even though some companies (such as Fairfax) have opposed deregulation in the past, this time round just about all the media organisations were pushing for change. The Fairfax board supported the Bill and appears keen to proceed with consolidation with another media group. Only the Seven Network objected to the Bill, along with some smaller independent radio networks, which could be subsumed within larger groups or left unable to compete with vast cross-media conglomerates. Even the ABC and SBS failed to express reservations about further concentration in the private sector.

Against this, public interest and consumer groups and a collection of media academics continued to oppose further concentration and a loss of diversity. While the advocates of the Bill argued that the internet and pay TV have resulted in an expansion of media sources, its opponents argued that many of these sources are recycled from existing media sources and originate from overseas with no local content.

What are the implications of further deregulation for Australian news journalists; and the public?

By the standards set in most other industries, journalists already lead precarious professional lives, especially print journalists. If you're in Brisbane working for the sole daily newspaper, the Courier-Mail, and you fall out with your employer (News Corp), where else is there to go? Increased concentration compounds this problem for journalists. Whether newsrooms for different media platforms would be combined is another issue, although some regional proprietors have signalled that they see worthwhile economies emerging from cross-media holdings.

The public faces more of the same. And already in Australia there is growing recognition of the role of commercial interests in setting boundaries around news and current affairs. If a media company has an important stake in another industry, that may well affect the ways in which the news outlet reports on that industry. Structural regulation of ownership at least ensures some level of diversity by providing alternative sources of comment. Further co-ownership narrows those opportunities for independent and impartial reporting.

Perhaps the effects will be most keenly felt by people in regional areas, where there are far fewer players. In many places in Australia, there are only one or sometimes two owners of the commercial radio stations. And if the local paper is not a daily paper, it's not subject to the cross-media rules so that same company might own all commercial radio as well as the local paper. Further deregulation could add TV to the mix.

What about Telstra? Will they become a media network?

Before the election the CEO of Telstra said that buying Fairfax was well and truly out of the question and that Telstra would focus on its core business, not adding to its media interests. This is a commendable attitude, if you're at all concerned about media diversity. Let's hope it remains Telstra policy.

Is there any research into what the 'public' thinks on this issue?

Very little. From the outcry when Prime and Southern Cross withdrew their local TV services from places like Wollongong, Newcastle and Townsville, we do know that people feel strongly about the importance of local alternatives. And anecdotal evidence tells us that people in some regional areas have faced problems when they try to access their local media with issues that don't correspond with the interests of the local media owner.

One of the difficulties in promoting public debate about media ownership is that reduction of media diversity (as a news issue) is something that conflicts with the commercial interests of the news organisations themselves. It is seldom covered by commercial media. The sources of news and comment on this issue are generally limited to ABC radio and TV and the national dailies, with occasional coverage by a few other papers. As a result, it's hard to see how the election 'mandate' theory could ever work for an issue like deregulation of media ownership — very few people even know about it!

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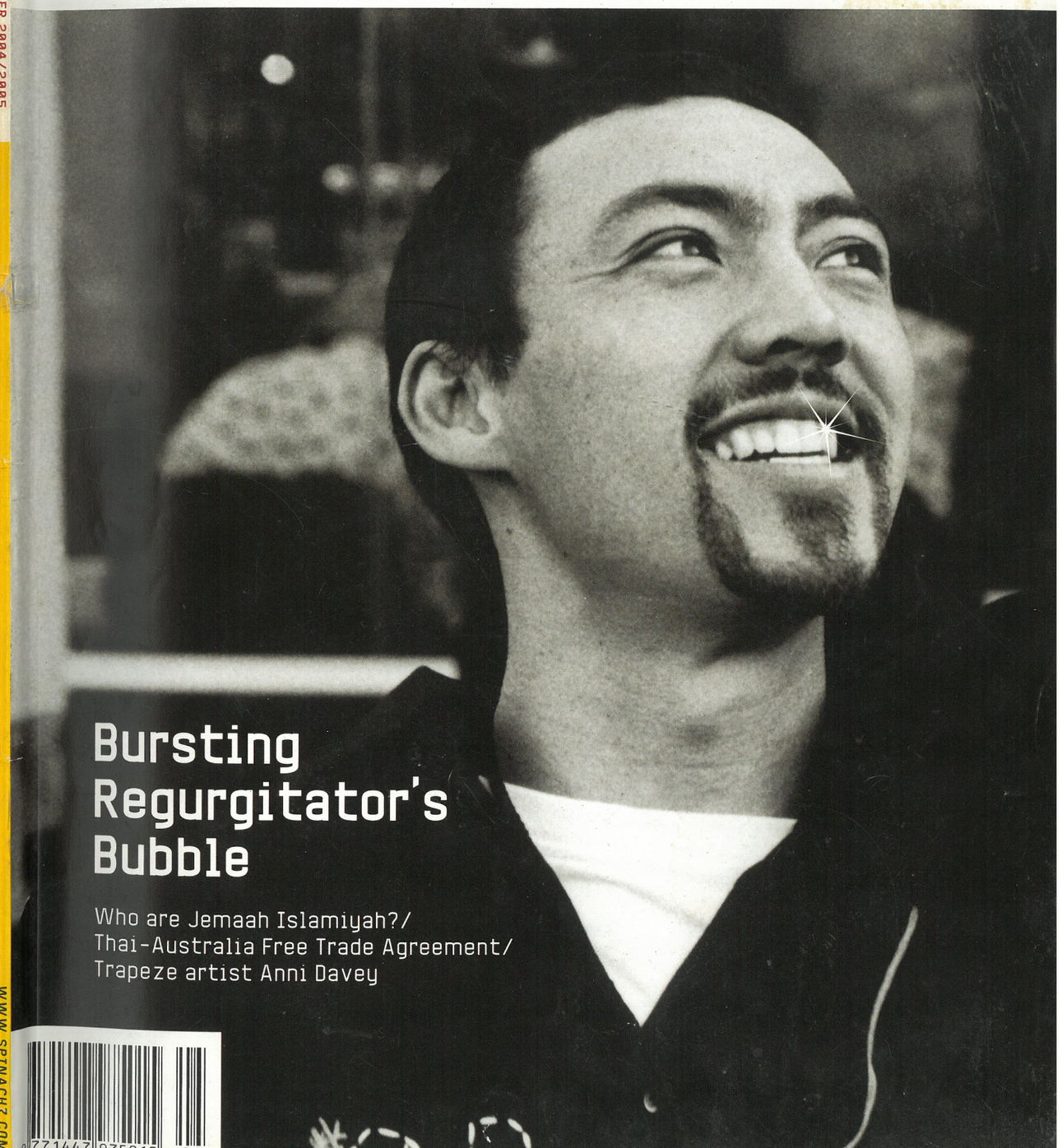

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